

Title

OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN: LIFE EXPERIENCES OF MAURITIAN LEARNERS

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Declaration

I, Jacques Laval Lindsay Paul, declare that:

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Dedication

All throughout my career, I was inclined in believing that children do not drop out because of academic failures and that it was very difficult for a child to wish to drop out. However, I also believed that the women behind the scenes did play an important role in children's decision. I therefore dedicate this piece of research to all the women, whom I have called the 'unsung heroes', whose contributions are rarely valued in this patriarchal society. The dedication goes more specially to:

- a) My mother, a primary school teacher, who single-handedly, without my father's contribution, imbibed her five children, including me, to the value of education and who passed away at a very young age because of the ill-treatment that she received and being our protector.
- b) My wife, who most probably has sacrificed her own career so that I may reach this present stage of scholarship and who daily has put up with my whims and fancies depending on the reports I obtained and despite the fact that I, at times, took the decision to drop out.
- c) The mothers, matriarchs and girls of this island who are still suffering and dying from male physical and sexual violences, and who heroically wake up every morning to fulfil their duties of bread-winner and protector. Whenever they engage in malpractice, there are circumstances of life that have not been favourable to them, such as teenage pregnancy and children marriage.

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Abstract

This study explores the early formal schooling experiences of out-of-school children (OOSC) who have completed their Certificate of Primary Education and who for multiple reasons do not transit to secondary education within the Mauritian education system. The qualitative insight into the nuanced life experiences of OOSC challenges the generally negative interpretation of ‘school dropouts’. Using a narrative inquiry approach, the study reflects the complexities of the experiences of the children in their homes, immediate community environments and in their school contexts. Through the interviews, observations, and related documents consulted, vivid comparative narrative accounts of their life experiences were constructed revealing the links between children’s life experiences and their dropping-out of school. The findings show that despite educational systems-wide policy rhetoric that professes the inclusion of all learners, the participants progressively disengaged with the schooling project. Formal schooling systemic processes continue to privilege middle-class values, and societal normative conceptions of families, homes with preferred behaviour and school conduct serving as push out factors. The in-home, in-school and personal interpretations of their selfhood served as pull-in forces that were more powerful than the policy rhetoric of inclusion. A naïve hope of success is counteracted by personal agentic belief in their resilience. Present policy efforts are considered to inadvertently promote continuity of past inequalities of a bifurcated schooling system rather than address equitable change. Alternatively, this thesis argues that a more sensitive “pedagogy of equity” (founded on principles of a pedagogy of critical hope) should be promoted to allow nuanced regionally specific strategies to address the identifiable cultural, economic and social contexts of the children and their communities.

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List of Abbreviations

ADS	Atelier du Savoir (Knowledge Hub)
ANFEN	Adolescent Non-Formal Education Network
BOI	Board of Investment
CDU	Child Development Unit
CEB	Central Electricity Board
CIS	Community In School Organisation
CPE	Certificate of Primary Education
CPU	Child Protection Unit
CREATE	Consortium for Educational Access, Transitions and Equity
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CWA	Central Water Authority
CYC	Correctional Youth Centre
EFA	Education For All
EHRSP	Education and Human Resources Strategic Plan
EOC	Equal Opportunities Commission
EPZ	Export Processing Zone (s)
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
HRDC	Human Resource Development Council

HSC	Cambridge Higher School Certificate
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IRS	Integrated Resort Scheme
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MES	Mauritius Examination Syndicate
MIE	Mauritius Institute of Education
MITD	Mauritius Institute of Trading and Development
MoECHR	Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources
MQA	Mauritius Qualifications Authority
NEF	National Empowerment Fund
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NCE	National Certificate of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODEROI	Indian Ocean Child's Right Observatory
OOSC	Out of School Children
PRB	Pay Research Bureau
PSAC	Primary School Achievement Certificate
PSC	Public Service Commission
PSLE	Private School Leaving Certificate

PTA	Parent Teacher’s Association
PVE	Prevocational Education
RCEA	Roman Catholic Education Authority
RYC	Rehabilitation Youth Centre
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SAFIRE ¹	Service D’Accompagnement, de Formation, D’Insertion et Rehabilitation de l’Enfant Re-insertion and rehabilitation of homeless children’
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SC	Cambridge School Certificate
TJC	Truth and Justice Commission
UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNDP	United Nations Development Plan
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
ZEP	Zone of Educational Priority

¹ Service D’Accompagnement, de Formation, D’Insertion et Rehabilitation de l’Enfant
Re-insertion and rehabilitation of homeless children

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This thesis report consists of three parts: Part 1 sets up the rationale for the study in the Mauritian context, the review of the literature and the theoretical framework and the methodology used for the study. Part 2 focuses on the narratives of the participants and the cross-case analysis. Part 3 synthesises the analysis and provides a conclusion to the study.

Part 1 consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the critical question of out-of-school children or commonly called school dropouts. Little is known, not only in Mauritius but also elsewhere, about the *process* of dropping out from school as voiced out by the participants themselves. My aim was to find out what was the relation between the school dropouts and their life experiences in order to shed new light on the particular context in which the research was being carried out.

In Chapter 2, emphasis is laid on the abundant literature available on factors leading to school dropouts. However, little is known about the process of dropping out. Factors may be socially, individually, institutionally or contextually related. Having identified this gap in the literature Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development (1979) identifying the potential multiple layers of influence on the processes of growth and development was chosen as a theoretical framework in order to develop the instruments for the data collection. This framework was complemented with a Force Field model (Samuel, 2008) identifying the interaction between personal and systemic factors, which was used as an analytical framework. The research methodology is discussed and developed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY:

THE JOURNEY

1.1 Overview

The issue of out-of-school children (OOSC) in Mauritius is known mostly to non-formal institutions that accommodate children who have dropped out from the formal education system before the age of 16. However, limited consistent opinion has been raised in favour of those children in any official local national forum. The matter of out of school children therefore tends to be a restricted concern of only those (like SAFIRE, 2017; ANFEN, 2001) who have to deal with the consequences of managing school dropouts. Notably, the issue of OOSC came to be considered as a matter of importance for the Consortium for Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) which aimed to probe more deeply and comparatively across different countries, into how and why children transition through schooling. Although many countries have achieved relative improvements in access to education, the problem that remains to be addressed is that “those enrolled who cannot attend (schooling) regularly and, therefore, learn little, and fail to make the transition to secondary schooling” (CREATE, 2007, p. vi). This study acknowledges the efforts made by CREATE (2007, p. 1) to “universalise primary education access” in developing countries and it aims at exploring the fate of children in the exclusionary transition from primary to secondary schooling. This is further explained in 1.4.1.

1.1.1 Starting the journey

To reach its objective of education for all by 2015, UNESCO has provided eight reasons why education is important to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nations. Through education, extreme poverty and hunger can be eradicated, universal primary education achieved, gender equality and women empowerment promoted, child mortality reduced, maternal health improved, diseases prevented, environmental sustainability ensured and global partnership and development improved (UNESCO 2009-2014). Nevertheless, despite the importance of education, many children

drop out at early stages of schooling. Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook and Hunt (2010) state that even though more children are accessing primary schools, the rate of dropouts has also increased. Various organisations such as UNESCO, the CREATE,² have advanced reasons such as poverty, poor environment, sickness, caring for siblings and relatives, seasonality, local opportunity costs for cash income, costs, transport issues, school discipline and low achievement to explain children's dropout. Yet very little is known of children's experiences of formal education and whether these experiences contribute to their dropping out.

In many countries, including Mauritius, access to lower secondary schools is not automatic. Depending on the results obtained at the end of primary schooling, children who have succeeded join the formal lower secondary stream, while those who have not are admitted into what is known as the Prevocational Education (PVE) in Mauritius. At the end of the sixth standard (end of primary education) (several policies address 'standard' as Grade See 1.3.2.) children are channelled to the secondary level which runs from Form 1 (Grade 7 in new policy see 1.3.2) to Higher School Certificate, i.e. seven years of education. Lower secondary schools run classes from Form one (Grade 7) to Form five (Grade 11), at the end of which children sit for the Cambridge School Certificate examination. Recently a national examination has been introduced at Form three level (Grade 9), from which children opt for different subject combinations (science side, business side or technical side). At the end of Form five children sit for the Cambridge School Certificate examination and are awarded a certificate (SC certificate). This certificate serves as a promotion to Higher School Certificate classes (Grades 12 to 13), at the end of which they sit for the Higher School Certificate of Cambridge (HSC) (more details about the changes in Mauritian education system are available in 1.3.2).

² More detail of the international comparative CREATE study project under the auspices of the Department for International Development (DfID) (United Kingdom) will be explored in Chapter 2.

1.1.1.1 The uniqueness of the prevocational system (PVE) of Mauritius

As a comparison, according to data obtained from The US Education System overview (2015), American children start schooling at age five at the kindergarten. At six years old, children start the first year of primary schooling, called Grade 1. At 10 years old, children end Grade 5, i.e. the end of primary schooling and they move to secondary school which starts from Grade 6 to Grade 12, making up seven years of secondary schooling (referred to as high school).

Singapore's educational system offers different options at the end of their Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) (Ministry of Education Singapore, 2015). After six years of compulsory primary education, (first four years for foundation courses and two years of orientation course, with the aim of providing children a good grasp of English language, Mother Tongue and Mathematics), students are channelled to either the Express, Normal (academic) or Normal (technical) courses depending on their performance at the PSLE for 4-5 years of secondary education leading to the "O" level examination. The differences between these courses vary in the curriculum in order to match student's learning abilities and interests. The Express course offers Life Skills, Knowledge Skills, Languages, Mathematics and Sciences and Humanities and the Arts. Both Normal (academic) and Normal (Technical) courses offer as basic Life Skills and Knowledge Skills but they differ in the compulsory subjects. Normal (academic) subjects are English, Mathematics and the Humanities whereas Normal (technical) puts emphasis on Computer applications courses, English and Mathematics.

Hence, the PVE seems to be a system unique to Mauritius in that only those children who have failed their Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) get access to the prevocational institutions. Most secondary schools (colleges) have two sections in their institutions, namely the normal stream section, providing education to children who have been successful at the CPE and the prevocational section providing classes to children who have twice failed their CPE. This will be further explained in sub-paragraph 1.3.3.4. Though this system shows some degree of inclusiveness, the PVE sections are completely separated from the normal stream in that they have their own teachers, curriculum and, in some schools, separate times for breaks, which shows a high degree of exclusiveness, thus causing students who attend PVE classes to feel excluded from the normal stream (see 1.3.3.4).

Out of the 38% of children who fail their CPE, calculated estimates from education statistics show that an average of 22.5 % are out of school (Table 1.2). This percentage seems to repeat itself every year as shown (Table 1.2).

Table 1.1: Admission to PVE stream (2011- 2014)

		A	B	C	D	E	F	G
		First timers joining PVE1	Repeaters Joining PVE 1	1.1 First timers joining PVE1	1.2 Repeaters Joining PVE 1	I	II	III
1	2011					2544	2674	4819
2	2012					2674	2364	2183
3	2013	3989	2687	2197	2622	4819	2202	1929
4	2014					2888	3662	

Source: Statistics Mauritius, 2013

Table 1.2: Calculation of dropouts per section in 2013

	I	I	II	III	
	First timers	From repeaters PVE I to	From PVE I 2012 to PVE II 2013	From PVE II 2012 to PVE III 2013	Total dropout in 2013
	A3-C3	B3-D3=	E2-F3=	FG-F3=	
Dropouts in 2013	1792	65	472	435	2764
%	44%	2%	21%	22%	22.3%

Source: Worked figures

The paradox is that some of these OOSC who do not follow the lower secondary prevocational programme in the formal schooling system are admitted in NGO centres (which are considered to be informal institutions) where informal education is provided to them, free of charge. The aims of the NGOs are to provide basic literacy, reading and

writing skills, skills that the OOSC could not acquire in formal schooling (see 1.5.1). When comparing the education system of Mauritius and other countries such as the US and Singapore, I note that we have an education system in Mauritius which excludes children who have failed during their early years of schooling to channel them towards a prevocational system which may not suit their convenience. It seems that they rather drop-out in order to follow informal schooling in the NGOs. Why do children leave the formal system to join the informal one? Who are these children and what are the barriers that they face in their life for them to take such action?

This study aims at capturing the OOSC experiences of pre-primary and primary formal education and how these experiences have influenced their disengagement to be 'out of school' and to drop-out. This phenomenon of OOSC is not inherent to Mauritian education but is a global problem affecting children. UNESCO (2005) figures show that in 2001/2002, 115 million children of primary school age were out of school. Furthermore, the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) report informs us that among the 80% of children who live in countries with compulsory lower secondary education, 12% are still out of school (UIS, 2010, p. 15).

However, the study by The CREATE gives a more detailed account about out-of-school children in the countries where research has been conducted and this will be dealt more in detail in 1.4.1.

1.2 Orientation to Chapter 1

This chapter gives an insight into the background of the context within which the study was conducted. The chapter consists of three sections. **Section A** highlights the background of the Mauritian context and its educational system. This section also includes the different reforms the country went through since 1984 and an introduction to the research carried out by the CREATE. **Section B** highlights the rationale, the objectives and the research questions. **Section C** highlights the structure of the thesis and synthesises the chapter.

SECTION A

1.3 About Mauritius

1.3.1 The Mauritian context in general

The State of Mauritius, which comprises the islands of Rodrigues, St. Brandon and Agalega, is situated some 950 kilometres east of Madagascar. Selvon (2012) reports that slaves from Madagascar brought by the Dutch, around the year 1645, ran away and populated the dense forests that were impenetrable to the colonisers. They burnt and destroyed everything built around their abodes (Selvon, 2012). The Dutch left in 1656, burning down all that could be used by fugitive slaves. After a second attempt by the Dutch to colonise Mauritius they left finally in 1710 leaving behind more slaves. Selvon (2012, p. 89) reports that “there were also in the forests, an unknown number of fugitive slaves and there were enough reasons to believe that a small colony of Mauritians, mostly runaway slaves from Asia and Africa and those Europeans and other deserters who joined them, was formed in the remotest parts of the island”.

The French colonisers established a permanent settlement in 1721. In 1723, the island was populated by slaves from Madagascar, East and West Africa to help with development plans, in the sugarcane fields, in construction matters and houses as per the wish of the owners. The French colonisers set up an administration system, and developed the capital, Port Louis as a viable naval base. They introduced a system of land concessions based on specific conditions that the beneficiaries needed to cultivate the lands within a period of three months. Huge portions of land were allocated in the region of Moka, Flacq, Pamplemousses, Savanne, Plaine Wilhems. Selvon (2012) tells us that this system of concession of land engaged more slave populations to work, thus laying the foundation of modern Mauritius. The slaves, together with the engaged workers and the artisans from France, India, Madagascar and Africa were engaged in the building of, for example, roads and bridges, and in cultivation. Selvon (2012, p. 98) explains that

people of European and non-European descent (including the slaves) were sent from Bourbon (Reunion Island) to colonise Isle de France (Mauritius). They constituted, with the settlers who came directly from France and Madagascar (slaves brought in 1722) the core of the original population of Mauritius, in

addition to whatever the number of fugitive slaves and some others, who would have been living in the deep of the forests from the Dutch period. A number of Indians were also sent to settle in Mauritius as workers, sailors, slaves etc. and a few Chinese came in the next decade of the 18th century, so that Mauritius was already a multi-ethnic society at a very early stage of history.

The colonial education system started under the French period. However, Bunwaree (1997) tells us that there was a great reluctance by the French to expand education on the island. “There was a strong discrimination against the black and coloured people and women but the situation changed dramatically when the British took over in 1810” (Bunwaree, 1997, p. 3). In 1810, after the great battle of Grand Port, the island became an English colony. With the abolition of slavery in 1839, indentured labourers from India were used as manpower. The Chinese who came to Mauritius worked mainly in commerce. In 1916 a law abolished indentured labour. Many of the indentured labourers chose to stay on the island. Gill (2010) tells us that some sugar estates were sold off to former indentured labourers who settled in rural areas causing what she called small landowner villages. Slaves descendants were not offered the same privileges, and they squatted on private or crown lands.³ We can see from the colonial history that Mauritius is rich in terms of ethnic and religious diversity. This diversity, however, is felt by many as being at times, sources of discrimination and exclusion in the education sector (Asgarally, 1997; Gill, 2010).

This passage on the settlement in Mauritius is important when considering land policy in Mauritius, as large portions of land are in the hands of either the rich sugar cane owners or the state. How the land was acquired was one of the mandates of the Truth and Justice Commission (TJC) report (2011). It seems that after independence, power was shared between the oligarchs and the state for the disposal of huge portions of land that belonged to them. The latest policy of “smart cities” (Economic Development Board, 2019; Government Notice, 2015) and the Integrated Resort Schemes (IRS) (Board of Investment, 2015) have given rise to a slow process of gentrification and accentuated the effect of urban and rural disadvantaged areas. I wish to emphasise this aspect of

³ Land owned by the state

settlement, land distribution and acquisition, rural and urban disadvantage and gentrification as they are important issues which show that systemic inequality and inequity date back from the settlement periods and are still being applied. By continuing this, the marginalisation of the deprived will be exacerbated. The land distribution and acquisition and the gentrification process is still disputed up till now.

1.3.1.1 *Urban disadvantaged areas*

The World Bank Group (2011) defines an urban poverty environment as an environment of the suburbs areas where people are deprived of certain facilities such as adequate and secure housing and services, having limited access to employment facilities or employed on a low income, living in an unhealthy and violent environment, with little or no social protection mechanism, and having limited access to adequate health and education facilities. These are usually referred to as ‘Cités’ in Mauritius and have sprouted as housing schemes for the poor and the vulnerable. A report from United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), (2012) tells us that most of these ‘Cités’ are overcrowded, with a poor maintenance of housing infrastructure, and poor living conditions. They fall under the mandate of municipal councils.

Most of the ‘Cités’, henceforth referred to as housing estates, are the product of policy decisions of successive governments, as a means to rehabilitate vulnerable groups through social housing (UN-Habitat, 2012). Two institutions are responsible to follow-up the smooth running of low-cost housing schemes, the National Empowerment Foundation (NEF) (attached to the Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment, and the National Housing Development Company (under the aegis of the Ministry of Housing and Lands). The housing programmes are contributory, though defaulters do exist. The municipal council is responsible to provide infrastructure and amenities and all parties concerned are not working in unison for the welfare of the newcomers in the region, who make use of existing facilities such as recreational resources, early school education resources etc. Yet, those who were poor and could not afford to pay a housing programme resort to squatting or to overcrowding the existing facilities. Thus, these housing estates lack resources that will inhibit the development of its inhabitants. Raffo (2014), basing himself on the OECD, 2008 report informs us that educational outcomes of young people who live in conditions of poverty are more likely to be lower than children from affluent areas. He argues that there is a strong correlation between “the

geographical spread of poor aggregate educational attainments and the disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods of major cities and de-industrialised coastal and mining towns” Raffo (2014, p. 41).

1.3.1.2 *Rural disadvantaged areas*

The conception of rural disadvantaged is quite different from urban regions. Rural environments fall under the mandate of district councils, as opposed to their counterparts of the urban region. People living in rural areas are also deprived of certain facilities as mentioned above, but poverty is localised in small areas called pockets of poverty. The reports from the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) (2012) inform us that the district council covers many of these poverty-stricken settlements. These are characterised by lack of planning, rapid urbanisation, poor infrastructure and a shortage of basic services such as water, sanitation and electricity. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) (2013) informs us that those people are mainly fishermen, textile workers and labourers. Nevertheless, one district council where there is the highest rate of deprived and vulnerable areas attribute the high population rate as the result of illegal squatting settlements and that they (the district council) do not have appropriate funds to cater for these settlements. According to them, the proliferation of the squatting settlements has brought a very high level of insecurity and fear among the population (UN-Habitat, 2012, p. 28). This is the type of discourse to which Raffo referred in subsection 1.3.1.1 above. This region being referred to, has a very significant natural heritage value, having been recognised by the UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. Its value is universal as it is a symbol of slaves’ fight for freedom from a mountain being used as a fortress during maroonage (UNESCO World Heritage, 2014). Its symbolism is also carried to the time where the slaves created small settlements on and around the mountain to escape from the slave owners.

Land issues in the district are managed by the Ministry of Housing and Land, which also looks after the resettlement of the squatters. Wide areas of land are either the property of the Medine sugar estate or portions of crown land. This issue of squatters or non-squatters is a matter that has been raised at the TJC. There have been two ways in which land was acquired during slavery and indentured days. According to the TJC (2011), slave descendants settled in the Southwest region of Black River, as suggested by Selvon, (2012) as being the deep forests. The request by the TJC (2011, p. 425) that

“the area known as Trou Chenille be officially recognised as a site of former settlement by inhabitants, many of whom are descendants of slaves having lived there for generations (and not as squatters) and that their removal be recognised as ‘forced’ is an evidence that settlement did exist and that by no way these areas were squatted. It is unfortunate that the 2nd, 3rd and 4th volumes of the TJC have never been published, especially when it is known that volume 2 deals with the land problems and the analysis of claims concerning land disposessions. The TJC strongly recommended that a land monitoring and research unit be set up, not only to look after the claims but also to provide a fair and equitable distribution of land. The other way for indentured labourers to acquire land was from the Metayage system, also known as sharecropping, introduced by estate owners. These are the ex-slave and ex-indentured labourers who were given a piece of land on the estate where they were working, to grow sugar cane, exploited cheaply by the sugar estates. These did not have the same status of squatting, as their contracts are valid. This statement is by the TJC, (2011, p. 4), that

land speculation, poverty, greed of some family members, the corruption of officials and professionals, an ever encroaching sugar industry and laws that protect the traditional economic structure have ensured that landownership remains in the hands of the same traditional economic elite who have today been joined by members of the state bureaucracy, politicians and the new business community. This gives an idea of how the social representation theory is projected in all its splendour and which is used to introduce the next subsection. Nevertheless, these marginal lands have now become more valuable with the different development, mainly in irrigation, electricity, roads and tourism, so much so that sugar estates are claiming back these lands to be sold to foreign clientele or to expand the tourism industry.

1.3.1.3 *Regional distribution of the Mauritian population*

This land saga, especially in the western region of Mauritius, resulted in a division of the regions of Mauritius into rural and urban areas. According to the Central Statistics Office (2000), urban areas are located mostly in the north-western inland part of Mauritius, occupying the whole district of Port Louis and part of the districts of Plaines Wilhems, Black River and Moka (these urban regions also have an attached suburban regions). In the Mauritian context, the distinction between of urban and rural regions is quite problematic due to the fast-expanding development of the country. From 1965 to 1991, the urban areas boundaries have increased from 5% to 8.8% of the total area of the

island. This increase was attributed, according to Statistics Mauritius (2000), to the growth of suburban areas around the existing urban boundaries. Urban regions are administered by municipal councils whereas the rural areas are administered by district councils. Further figures provided by Statistics Mauritius show that 15% of children aged 12 were illiterate i.e. they could not neither read nor write a simple statement in their everyday life and that illiteracy rate was higher in rural areas as compared to urban areas. By constantly providing social security services to the deprived through the housing scheme, it seems that there is a displacement and relocation of the population that is being reinforced and that segregation starts at this level. This segregation was continued at the school level as we will see later.

Table 1.3 gives a distribution of the Mauritius population after the population census of 2011.

Table 1.3: Regional distribution of population (2011 Census)

District	Population (both sexes)
Port Louis (Wholly Urban)	118,431
Pamplemousses (Wholly rural)	136,268
Rivière du Rempart (Wholly rural)	106,267
Flacq (Wholly rural)	135,406
Grand Port (Wholly rural)	110,907
Savanne (Wholly rural)	67,906
Plaines Wilhems (Urban)	356,468
Plaines Wilhems (Rural)	5,824
Moka (Rural)	81,009
Moka (Urban)	1,293
Black River (Urban)	23,157
Black River (Rural)	53,447

Source: Housing and Population Census, (2011, p. 3)

1.3.1.4 *Evaluation of the Mauritian context*

The making up of urban and rural regions is a crucial factor in understanding the residential zones settings in Mauritius and a useful indicator of its further effects on the regionalisation process. This is important in the study because the type of residential zone decides on the type of school and the types of resources that a child will get in school. There is often a gradual migration of the population from a rural area to a suburban region because living in an urban area meant that it was more easy to get a job in one of the developing industries. It means that children who were previously attending a rural school would be admitted to a suburban school. Space has been made in suburban areas in view of alleviating the housing problems, but the appropriate environmental resources such as sports facilities, school facilities and market facilities, have not been provided by the municipal or district councils, thus creating what Gill (2005) calls ‘pockets of poverty’. This idea is also taken up by the IFAD (2011) which mentioned that there were ‘pockets of poverty’ in the northern and eastern parts of the island. This study will try to examine if children living in rural, urban and suburban regions respectively experienced schooling differently.

According to the IFAD (2011), people living in urban and rural poor regions have a low level of education and cannot cope with the changes occurring in economic and social life. Their inability to cope with the trending economic system hampers modernisation, a matter raised by the World Bank. As a result, their involvement in the schooling of their children was minimal. The parents lived in a precarious situation and were vulnerable, and the children attended schools where they felt stigmatised. This may refer to regions where the schools have a low percentage success at the CPE examination. How do teachers and school administrators deal with children from poor regions? Are school discipline policies used for any breach where the children do not conform to the system? It may be that these issues cause children from poor regions to be pushed-out or to drop-out from schooling. However, this does not explain what is wrong with the environment that pushes children out of school or get children to drop out.

This paragraph and sub-paragraphs on the settlement and the regions of the island is of utmost importance in the study as firstly we can notice how the system segregates society since the time of settlement up till now and how through the regionalisation

process of schooling, this segregation is perpetuated because indigent children do not necessarily access schools of their choice.

1.3.2 A culture of reforms

It is recognised internationally that Mauritius has achieved considerable progress in order to meet all the targets proposed by the Jomtein conference (1990), the Dakar conference on education (2000) (Association for the Development of education in Africa [ADEA], 2011). However, the rate of failure at the CPE, 40%, seems to be a serious problem, especially when the difference between the achievement scores between Mauritian children is concerned (ADEA, 2011). Despite several reforms since independence, scores in achievement between Mauritian children seem to be unequal according to the ADEA.

The education system in Mauritius is governed by the Education regulations of 1957 and the Education Act of 1982. Education, which was a private matter during the French and British occupation, was universalised in the 1940s, when primary education became free.

1.3.2.1 *From the World Bank recommendations 1985 to 2014*

There have been several attempts to reform the education system in Mauritius. In 1991 the recommendations of the World Bank (1985), the Master Plan, were introduced. In 1996, the in-coming government changed the education through the Action Plan (1996) (Ministry of Education and Scientific Research 1998). This was followed by the ‘rat race’, a reform to address the ‘bottleneck’ created by the high demand of ‘star secondary schools’ by more than 4500 children who obtained 4 A’s at the CPE examination (Ministry of Education and Scientific Research 2001). This was followed by the ‘World class quality education’ where emphasis was put on quality education (Ministry of Education and Human Resources, 2006). In 2008, the ‘Education reforms in action’ (Ministry of Education & Human Resources, 2014) was introduced followed by the ‘Nine Year Continuous Basic Education (NYCBE)’ in 2015. These reforms were introduced after each change of Government in order to address the inefficiencies of the education system. These reforms also addressed the different changes and demands in the global market in the capitalist world.

Bunwaree (2005) tells us that, despite these attempts, the inefficiencies of the education system were not addressed in the Master Plan in Education (1991) or the Action Plan (1996) as they were either partially or never introduced. However some major decisions taken along these years are still in practice today. The Zone of Educational Priority (ZEP) was introduced in 2003 (Ministry of Education and Human resources, 2002; Panday & Xu 2012). This project was introduced to provide more equality for children living in deprived areas where more attention were given to the performance level of low achieving schools. This project was initially known as the ‘special support schools’ (UNESCO IBE, 2006).

With the introduction of regionalisation, a zoning system (Table 1.4) is proposed as follows:

Table 1.4: Educational zoning system in Mauritius

Zones	Regions
Zone 1	Port Louis and North
Zone 2	Beau-Bassin-Rose-Hill, centre and East
Zone 3	Curepipe and South
Zone 4	Quatre Bornes, Vacoas Phoenix and West

Source: Ministry of education and scientific research, 2001)

We note that with each urban region (Port Louis, Beau Bassin-Rose Hill, Quatre Bornes and Vacoas-Phoenix and Curepipe) there are rural regions attached. This is done to ensure sufficient parental choice.

The ranking system was abolished and replaced by a “fair and objective grading system” (Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, 2001 p. 1-2). A new strategy for prevocational sector, introduced in 2001, includes extension of PVE classes from three to four years. The main components of the new strategy were:

An extension of the PVE programme from 3 to 4 years with a gradual integration of trade skills and entrepreneurial skills right from Year 1; a new delivery mode based on a mix of attendance of Year 3 and Year 4 in secondary schools and MID centres; a new curriculum based on four key domains of learning: communication

skills, numeracy and problem-solving skills, life skills, livelihood and trade skills. A new mode of assessment for a fully recognised certification enabling entry to further vocational education or the world of work is proposed (Ministry of Education and Human resources, 2014, p. 13).

Kreol Morisien (Mauritian Creole Language) and Bhojpuri (a dialect used by the Indians in Mauritius) were introduced at par with other Asian languages (Ministry of Education & Human Resources 2014).

1.3.2.2 *Assessment of the reforms*

We have seen through the different reforms how strategies change with the government in place, confirming the idea that changes in education are politically biased. All reforms seem to show that the previous system in place had flaws and it was their strategy that seemed to be the best for the development of education. At the same time the changes reflected the changing pattern of the capitalist global economy changes.

While earlier reforms tried to conform with the Jomtein and Dakar conventions, Mauritius was able to reach a level of 98% access to schooling. Even though the Master Plan and the Action Plan were not implemented, they had the merit of doing away with the recommendations of the World Bank in keeping secondary schooling free. The failure of the complete implementation of the Master Plan showed how the cultural and religious issues in Mauritius have a social as well as educational impact, especially where there is a perception that one religious group is advantaged over the other.

The reforms also showed how gradually there has been a shift in strategy from universal access to education to quality education, a recommendation of the World Bank that wanted to do away with repetition, move towards a Form 3 National examination and orientation of failures to prevocational training. All the changes were geared towards the changes in global economy.

Another issue shown by the reforms is that even though ministers and governments change, the bureaucracy, decried by the World Bank, remained in place, keeping the tradition of continuity in change. However, I believe that government officers implement decisions, policy or otherwise, dictated by government; they do not decide and do whatever they want. Children in the study were under the influence of the following two reforms: a World Class Quality Education (2006) and Education Reforms in

Action (2008-2014). Even though the discourses tend to give more equity, such “equity” favoured the elite to the detriment of the working-class children in primary school. Even though emphasis was on failures of the CPE and prevocational, the label carried by the term prevocational tends to give the perception that vocational and technical education is meant only for failures. I have also noticed that at no time the problem of school dropouts was addressed by the reforms. The Education Reforms in Action report did take into consideration the out-of-school children of the SEN sector but at no time was the issue of out-of-school children addressed. The perception is that with remedial education that had been proposed by each reform was enough to tackle the problem of illiteracy and CPE failure.

The next sub-section details the new reform called the Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education (NYCBE) that was applied after the field-work of the current study was done.

1.3.2.3 *Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education*

Since 2015, a new reform has been introduced by the new Minister of Education, the NYCBE, as it has been the case after each change of government. The focus of the NYCBE is on

enhancing the quality of basic education, low standard of which being the root cause of unskilled labour, unemployment and rising inequality and improving access and relevance to TVET polytechnic and higher education programmes aligned to the economic needs of the country (NYCBE, 2014, p. 1).

According to the reform, because “a high percentage of 15-year olds not reaching the international threshold of basic skills level” (NYCBE, 2014, p. 2), Mauritius cannot compete with other middle-income countries. The reform criticises the competition at the CPE examination and its effects on children.

The new reform claims that there will not be any primary school and PVE, because children will be brought to successfully complete the basic education cycle through different pathways, either in general or vocational or technical stream. At the same time, learning outcomes will be improved.

The following changes between the previous system and the new system are:

“The first 6 years of basic education is to be in primary schools (Grade 1-Grade 6).
(No change, except that standards are replaced by grades)

The last three years of basic education (Grade 7 to Grade 9) and will be called lower secondary. (Previously Form 1 to Form 3; no continuity in terms of transition to secondary schools)

Grade 10 and Grade 11 all be taught in secondary schools, as well as Grade 12 and Grade 13. (no change with previous system)”.

(NYCBE, 2014, p. 18) (Comments in italics are mine).

Despite changes in the curriculum, the traditional subjects that are used for examination criteria are maintained, i.e. English, French, Math, Science, History & Geography and Asian languages/Arabic/Kreol Morisien. Non-core subjects such as Physical Education, Civic and Values Education, IT Skills, Communication Skills and the Arts including Music, Dance, Painting and Drama have been introduced and assessed but are not taken into consideration in the assessment criteria. Only the scores of the best four core subjects will be taken into consideration for grading purposes (NYCBE, 2014).

Admission will be done the same way it was done, that is on a regional basis, except that the ‘star state schools’ will not accept children from Grade 7 onwards because they will be converted into ‘academies’. Hence the National schools will not be the focus attention at the time of transition but will keep their status after Grade 9 national examination. Other ‘star colleges’ will therefore spring up with the new system and transition will focus on these new ‘star colleges’

Children who have not been successful at Grade 6 will join a four-year extended programme in the extended stream, previously known as PVE. They will follow the same curriculum as the normal stream except that their programme will be covered in 4 years. They will afterwards sit for the NCE. On failing, they will join the TVET (not new except that they are disadvantaged because most are illiterate). It is expected that children who fail and join the “vocational training programmes have an advanced level of literacy and numeracy against the case for the current enrollees in the prevocational stream” (NYCBE, 2014, p. 35). I note that the segregation will continue between children who succeed the CPE and those who fail. Since it is a fact that children who fail and follow PVE have already a low level of literacy and numeracy (Table 1.9), getting

them to sit for the NCE seems to classify them again as failures. This is quite stigmatising and shows that despite all the reforms there is no real alternative programme for CPE failures.

1.3.3 The Mauritian educational system: Various stages of education in Mauritius

The existing Mauritius educational system, at the time of the study, is a remnant of the former British colonial education system with four tiers, namely pre-primary, primary, secondary, tertiary and higher studies. After the independence of Mauritius in 1968, education became one of the predominant preoccupations of the government in order to face the main challenges of the country. Devoid of any natural resources, Mauritius had to depend on its human capital to shape the island's economic growth prospects (Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources (2008); Pay Research Bureau (2008)).

Mauritius has had several education reforms since its independence and it is therefore important to understand the following terms. Pre-primary schooling starts at the age of four, despite the fact that some children are sent to kindergartens from the age of three. Pre-primary schools can be state funded or private funded. It may happen that some children do not attend pre-primary schooling before joining the primary sector. The formal stream of schooling consists of state schools (primary and secondary), Confessional (religious owned) schools, private schools all funded by the State. There are also private-owned fee-paying (primary and secondary) schools. At the end of CPE, children who succeed join the formal stream secondary schools (pure academic) while those who fail join the formal prevocational stream (academic + initiation to vocational). Children of less than 16 years of age who drop out usually join a non-formal (informal centre) institution which are usually NGO's funded by private funds such as the Corporate Social Responsibility funds (CSR). At the end of prevocational, children can join the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD).

A new mode of education system has been applied in 2015 called the Nine Year Continuous Basic Education (NYCBE) (see 1.3.2.3), but section 1.3.2 shows how since independence the education system have gone through several changes creating an

instability at nearly each change of government. This section defines the education system at the time of the study and before the field-work.

1.3.3.1 *Pre-primary education in Mauritius*

Figures from The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (2013) show that in March 2013, there were 945 schools providing pre-primary education in the island of Mauritius (Table 1.5):

Table 1.5: Distribution of pre-primary schools in the island of Mauritius (2013)

District	Total	Type of administration				
		ECCEA ¹	Municipal/ Village Council	RC HA2 /	NGO3	Private Individual
Port Louis (Urban)	126	18	17	1	10	80
Pamplemousses (Rural)	100	23	1	1	2	73
Rivière du Rempart (Rural)	91	23	2	-	2	64
Flacq (Rural)	119	30	-	3	1	85
Grand Port (Rural)	96	20	6	-	2	68
Savanne (Rural)	53	11	1	1	2	38
Plaines Wilhems (Urban/rural))	271	29	28	1	12	201
Moka (Urban/rural)	48	17	-	3	1	27
Black River (Urban/rural)	41	12	-	-	2	27
Island of Mauritius	945	183	55	10	34	663
Island of Rodrigues	33	3	-	-	25	5
Republic of Mauritius	978	186	55	10	59	668

Source: Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (2013)

Keys: ECCEA: Early childhood care education authority.

RC: Roman Catholic; HA: Hindu education authority; NGO: Non-government organisations

The figure also shows a concentration of 397 pre-primary schools in the region of Plaines-Wilhems and Port Louis (urban), i.e. 42% in urban regions. The districts having the lowest concentration of pre-primary schools are Moka (48 pre-primary schools), Savanne (53 pre-primary schools) and Black River (41 pre-primary schools). Table 1.3 shows the regional distribution of the population in the 2011 Census and the figures here show that the rural areas have fewer pre-primary schools. There is a possibility that children from rural areas do not attend a pre-primary school before starting primary schooling.

1.3.3.2 Primary education in Mauritius

As at March 2013, statistical figures show that 305 schools were providing primary education to children in the island of Mauritius (Table 1.6). The schools were distributed as follows:

Table 1.6: Distribution of primary schools in the island of Mauritius

District	Total	Type of Administration					
		Government		Private			
				Aided		Non-Aided	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Port Louis (Urban)	38	25	66	8	21	5	13
Pamplemousses(Rural)	33	23	70	-	-	10	30
Rivière du Rempart (Rural)	27	22	81	3	11	2	7
Flacq (Rural)	38	28	74	9	24	1	3
Grand Port (Rural)	30	25	83	5	17	-	-
Savanne (Rural)	17	14	82	3	18	-	-
Plaines Wilhems (Urban/rural)	78	44	56	13	17	21	27
Moka (Urban/rural)	26	20	77	4	15	2	8
Black River (Urban/rural)	18	12	67	3	17	3	17
Island of Mauritius	305	213	70	48	16	44	14
Island of Rodrigues	15	10	67	5	33	-	-
Republic of Mauritius	320	223	70	53	17	44	14

Source: Education statistics (2013)

The figures also show a concentration of 69 primary schools in the region of Plaines-Wilhems and Port Louis (urban), i.e. 22% in urban regions. The districts of Moka (20 primary schools), Savanne (14 primary schools) and Black River (12 primary schools) have the lowest concentration of primary schools. Since admission to primary schools is done in the residential zone that they live in, children very often travel long distances to attend a primary school in another district. The island of Mauritius is divided into four education zones, as shown in Figure 1.1 and Table 1.4. The figure shows that primary schools are not evenly distributed in all the zones and that some zones have more primary schools than others. Figure 1.1 shows that children in the rural regions need to travel long distances as there are lesser primary schools in these regions, as the zones (explained in 1.3.2) extend from rural to urban regions.

Educational Institutions by zone, 2012



Figure 1.1: Educational Institutions in Mauritius by Zone

Source: Digest of Education Statistics 2012

1.3.3.3 Enrolment and assessment in primary schools

According to the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research (2004), children of five years old are enrolled in a primary school in Standard I. From then on, the Mauritian child follows a minimum of six years of free and compulsory primary schooling that culminates with the end of the primary education cycle and the award of the CPE to those who succeed. Learners have the possibility to re-sit for the CPE if they wish so. Promotion up to Standard 6 is automatic; hence there is no retention in primary schools.

However, enrolment is done on a regional basis as prescribed by the Ministry of Education. Due to the importance of the end-of-year examination for admission to secondary schools, the Ministry is aware that there is a major dysfunction in the education system as there is a bottleneck to have access to the best secondary schools (Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, 2004). Some primary schools have a high success rate in CPE passes and consequently there was a strong demand for these schools. As the Ministry felt that it was the result of a ranking system (according to their marks obtained in each subject, children were ranked, see 1.3.2.) that was not efficient. The belief was that

the major dysfunction of the system had been the bottleneck situation created by the element of ranking at the CPE examination. The new strategy that has been adopted since 2002 has been the adoption of the Grade system, whereby a new alphabetical Grade system has replaced the ranking system such that all children obtaining the minimum pass grades now join the secondary mainstream while those who do not achieve these after two attempts at CPE join the secondary prevocational stream (UNESCO-IBE, 2006-2007, p. unknown).

At the same time a regionalisation policy to admission to secondary school was adopted in 2003. On the other hand, the system of catchment area was introduced in Mauritius in 1989 for enrolment in primary schools. Learners living geographically close to the school were admitted in the school in their catchment area. This policy is a targeted strategy adopted also in some United Kingdom contexts (Burgess, Greaves & Vignoles, 2020). This notion was introduced with the idea of decreasing the demand for high demand schools (also called ‘star schools’) but parents used several subterfuges, sometimes illegal, to get their children admitted to these schools. If an affluent person was living in a region where the only school where his children would be admitted is a ZEP school, the parent will either get the child admitted in a ‘star school’, or else go to a private fee-paying school.

1.3.3.3.1 *How parents bypass the legal admission process*

Before 2012, for parents to get their child admitted, they needed to produce the following documents for the admission of their child: their National Identity Card, the Birth Certificate of the Child and an Electricity Bill and Water Bill for the previous 3 months of their place of residence. Several subtle manoeuvres are used by parents as

soon as the child is born. For example, affluent parents may pay the utility bills of a person or a close relative living in the catchment area to a star school in order to be able to provide a proof of residence. For this reason, the areas were redefined in 2013 and, currently, for admission, parents have to provide a 'Proof of Residency Form', supported by certification of the genuineness of the address of the child by the Responsible Party; verification of the address of the child is carried out, in situ, by the police; and certification of the application documents by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources (Government Information Service, 2013). Such regulations are not unique to Mauritius as they are also in practice in New Jersey (Education Law center, 2005) and in UK (Burgess, Greaves & Vignoles, 2020). The reasons for all these changes in policy show the importance given to education and how affluent parents try to bypass current laws to ensure that their children have the 'best schools' possible. By having access to a 'star school', parents avoid the possibility that their child attend a school with a lower performance or be in the same school with children of deprived areas. The policy of 'smart city' or IRS also provides opportunities for affluent parents to avoid certain schools considered as low performing. This leaves the ZEP schools with a high concentration of working-class children, giving the feeling that the choice of school to be accessed is based on social status. Teachers and administrators do take into consideration this issue when they work with children from the ZEP schools (ODEROI, 2008).

As from Standard 5 up to Standard 6, the system becomes more competitive with at the end, the CPE. The CPE is a national examination conducted by the Mauritius Examination Syndicate (MES) which devises the syllabus; prepares and prints out the examination papers, and conducts the assessment and the marking. Although the marks allocated can be contested, there is no transparency in the mode of remarking as the MES is not authorised to show the marked sheet of the child contesting the marks.

The above sub-paragraphs show how the primary school system is rigidly controlled from admission till the marking and allocation of secondary school (this is also done by the MES, based on a series of choices made by the parents prior to the examination). Given that the CPE examination is a powerful tool for upward social mobility, parents are tempted to resort to illegal practices to ensure that their children succeed in the CPE examinations and are able to secure a place in a prestigious secondary school. Parents

prefer an education system that perpetuates elitism and any barrier that can hamper the elite from attaining a 'star secondary school' is eliminated unconsciously by the system. Accessing a 'star secondary school' also provides the possibility of regrouping all the elites in some schools that will later compete to obtain a State scholarship, called the laureate system. As a consequence of the increasing interest of the affluent parents in the success of their children in primary education, the chances for children from deprived families to attain a high level of achievement is minimal. The social and political values attached to success in primary schooling leave no place for the less powerful.

1.3.3.4 *Assessment criteria*

Five subjects are compulsory and taken into account for the ranking process: English, French, Mathematics, Science, and History. Geography and Oriental languages are optional. Mauritian Kreol (which is the native language of 70% of the Mauritian population (Rajah-Carrim, 2008)) has recently been introduced as an optional subject on par with Geography and Oriental Languages. Children who fail the CPE may have one re-sit (which is no longer the case with the introduction of Primary School Achievement Certificate (PSAC) in 2017 (see 1.3.2.3). Those who do not pass the CPE at either attempt are not eligible to join the secondary system but may join the Technical and Vocational Education stream, currently known as the Prevocational Education (PVE). After the CPE examinations children are admitted to regional secondary schools, also known as colleges⁴ according to their zones; those with the best results are admitted in National Colleges irrespective of the region from where they come. Hence, even access to secondary schooling and to which type of school learners would attend depends on the CPE results.

1.3.3.5 *Addressing inequalities through the ZEP*

To address the issue of social inequalities, and provide equal opportunities in all primary schools, the government, since 2002, has implemented educational programmes in some of the primary schools of the country in order to improve CPE exams results in the low

⁴ Secondary schools are also referred to as colleges

achieving schools. The initiative is now known as the Zones d'Education Prioritaires (ZEP) and in order to reach its objective, it seeks to involve the whole school community: school staff, parents, NGOs, businesses and community-based associations. Schools called Zone of Educational Priority (ZEP) are located in regions called 'pockets of poverty' or disadvantaged urban/rural environments. ZEP schools are classified as such because their Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) pass rate has been less than 40 percent for the past three years, as stated in a study conducted by the Indian Ocean Child's Right Observatory (ODEROI, 2008) for the Ministry of Education and funded by United Nations Development Plan (UNDP). Figure 1.2 shows the location of the ZEP schools in Mauritius and its dependencies. The key label on Figure 1.2 "school" refers to ZEP schools. The figure shows that there is a concentration of ZEP schools in Port-Louis and its peripheries as well as the peripheries of Plaines-Wilhems, along the coastal line of Black-River, in Grand-Port, Pamplemousses and Riviere du Rempart. All these regions considered as poor are situated mostly in rural or peripheries of urban regions also called sub-urban regions.

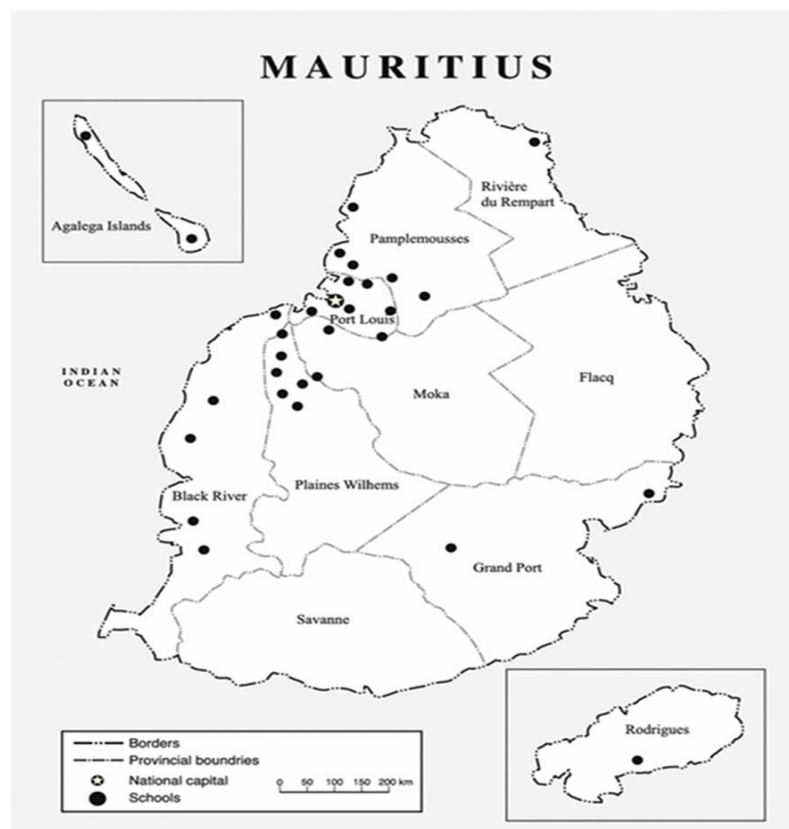


Figure 1.2: Distribution of ZEP schools in Mauritius and Rodrigues

Source: Kumar & Gurrib (2009, p. 3)

Wherever there are ZEP schools, there is a high concentration of children who are out of school and who have non-formal education at Adolescent's Non-Formal Education Network (ANFEN, 2007). ANFEN re-groups about 17 non-formal institutions over the island and offers alternative education to school-dropout adolescents (ANFEN, 2007). Alternative education does not necessarily mean a certification but the acquisition of life skills that will help children in later life. Figure 1.3 maps the location of non-formal schools associated to ANFEN and shows the similitude between Figure 1.2 and Figure 1.3. However, ANFEN is not the sole provider of non-formal education, as we can note that the Black River region does not have any institution affiliated to ANFEN. Other non-formal institutions such as CARITAS, Terre de Paix, Maison Familiale de l'Ouest etc. are also providers of non-formal education.

It can be seen that school dropouts are mostly children attending ZEP schools either in suburban or rural regions, such regions which are considered as socioeconomically poor. These regions lack resources to the working-class families but some are considered as tourist regions such as Black River in the west. In fact most coastal regions are tourist areas. Such regions however have facilities such as private fee-paying schools, supermarkets and hotels attached to the IRS and smart cities. This inequitable land distribution results in ZEP schools offering access to working-class children while other schools and fee-paying schools are accessed by middle-class children. The presence of the non-formal institutions in these regions of the ZEP school reinforces the idea that children attending ZEP schools drop out but still want to attend schooling in a non-formal way. At the same time, it reinforces my conviction that NGO's play a compensatory role in keeping out-of-school children from the streets where there is a high percentage of tourist resorts. These NGOs are funded by the CSR project from powerful companies. The functioning of one such NGO is given in 1.5.1.

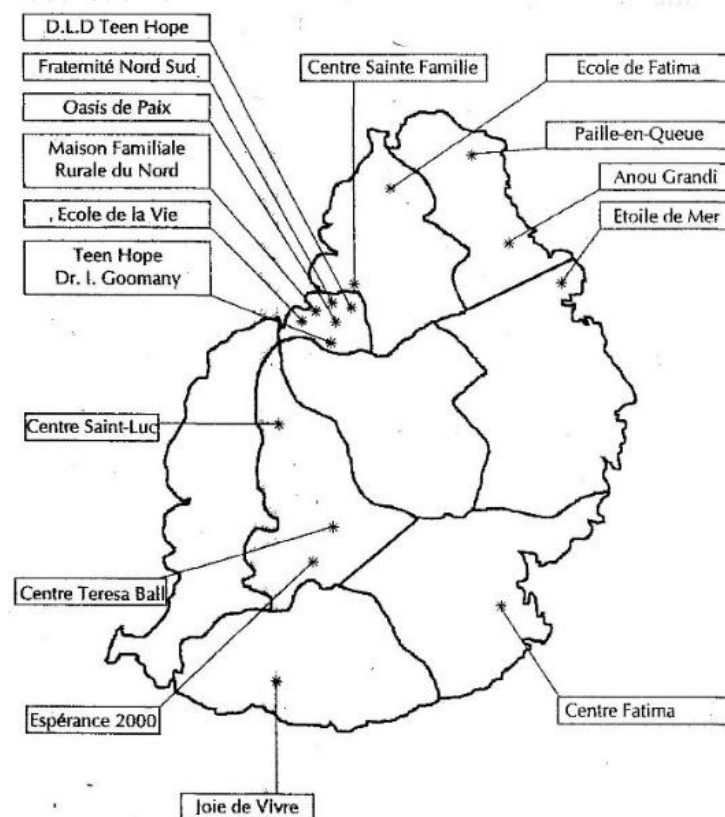


Figure 1.3: Location of non-formal schools associated to ANFEN

Source: Adolescent Non-Formal Education Network (2007)

1.3.3.6 *Enrolment in secondary schools*

Students who have been successful at the CPE examination are enrolled in the academic stream secondary schools. The same students have the possibility to study up to School Certificate (SC) after five years, and end their secondary schooling with the Higher School Certificate (HSC). Academic secondary schooling is seven years of study. Those who have failed the CPE examination have the possibility to re-sit for the examination the following year. If they fail, they are enrolled in the prevocational sector. In brief, successful CPE students move on to the secondary seven-year academic programme

(Table 1.7), while those failing the CPE follow the four-year vocational one (Table 1.8). However, despite the educational structures set up, the two tables (Table 1.7 and Table 1.8) show how important the CPE examination is for a child wishing to go for higher education. Amongst those who join the prevocational (PVE) education structure, there is a high rate of illiteracy which the curriculum of the PVE tends to alleviate (see 1.3.2). The PVE for school failures is a recommendation of the World Bank report (1985) and since then, most reforms have associated CPE failures to PVE. It gives the impression that the label attached to the PVE is that it is meant for school failures. The PVE as it is seems to be quite exclusive as it segregates children who failed CPE and those who succeed. Furthermore, the level of literacy and numeracy of the children who fail CPE and who attend the PVE is quite low as shown in Table 1.9. Even though children would be channelled to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) after the 4th year, the curriculum is simply a repetition of the normal system. We can see in the reforms section how the different reforms have proposed different solutions to tackle this problem of illiteracy. Therefore, children who believed that that they would be oriented towards a job are disillusioned since they need to go back to literacy and numeracy.

Table 1.7: Academic Formal Education Structure

Stage	Age	Status	Prerequisites	Class	Exams
Pre-Primary	3 - 5 Years	Compulsory	None	Year I Year II Year III	
Primary	5 - 11 Years	Compulsory	Pre-Primary Education	Standard I Standard II Standard III Standard IV Standard V Standard VI	Certificate of Primary Education

Stage	Age	Status	Prerequisites	Class	Exams
Lower Secondary	12 - 16 Years	Compulsory	Certificate of Primary Education	Form I Form II Form III	Form III Certificate
Upper Secondary	17 - 20 Years	Optional	Form III Certificate for School Certificate School Certificate for Higher School Certificate	Form IV Form V Lower VI Upper VI	School Certificate (O Level) Higher School Certificate (A Level)
Tertiary	18+ Years	Optional	Higher School Certificate		Leads to Bachelor's, Master's, PhD, and other academic degrees

Source:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20121021010500/http://www.gov.mu/portal/goc/cso/ei921/educate.pdf>

An impact evaluation of the PVE project commissioned by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) and prepared for its biennial meeting was conducted in 2003 and Table 1.9 below gives a broad idea of how far the objectives established for one year from the curriculum guidelines have been achieved.

Table 1.8: Vocational formal education structure

Qualification	Prerequisites	Class	Progression
Pre-vocational Certificate	Standard VI of Primary Education	Form I Form II Form III Form IV	National Trade Certificate Foundation

National Trade Certificate Foundation	Form III Certificate or Pre-vocational Certificate	Year I Year II Year III	National Trade Certificate II
National Trade Certificate II	National Trade Certificate Foundation	Year I Year II Year III	National Trade Certificate III
National Trade Certificate III	National Trade Certificate II	Year I Year II Year III	Post-secondary qualifications

Source:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20121021010500/http://www.gov.mu/portal/goc/cso/ei921/educate.pdf>

Table 1.9: Impact assessment of PVE

Achievement	Could	Could not but now can	Could not and still cannot
Read and understand French	24%	48%	28%
Write sentence in French	25%	52%	24%
Read and understand English	17%	64%	18%
Write sentenced in English	19%	60%	21%
Add two numbers	25%	46%	29%
Subtract a number from another	23%	41%	36%
Count up to 100	24%	40%	36%
Multiply two numbers	22%	45%	33%
Perform a simple division	20%	47%	33%
Read time	24%	38%	38%

Source: ADEA (2003), p. 14

Unfortunately, in 2011, the project still presented the following challenges and weaknesses:

“-Untrained teachers. Most of them have no pedagogical skills to teach students with major learning difficulties.

- Negative perception of prevocational stream. The project has led to a negative branding of students.

- Lack of self-esteem and self-confidence among students.
- High dropout rates mostly in the 2nd and 3rd years.
- Failure of many students to access the National Trade Certificate Foundation Course after three years of Prevocational Education.
- Absence of formal certification. Whatever the children have learnt is not recognised. This acts as a demotivating factor for them to work hard.”

(Source: Ministry of Education and Human Resources, 2011, p ii)

The report also established the dropout rates in prevocational sectors since 2003 to 2009 as presented in Table 1.10.

Table 1.10: Vocational formal education structure

Year	Admitted	Completed	Completion Rate	Dropout Rate
2003	2825	1507	84.62%	15.38%
2004	3109	1570	69.32%	30.68%
2005	4157	2276	80.57%	19.43%
2006	3756	2418	77.77%	22.23%
2007	2920	3026	72.79%	27.21%
2008	2677	2640	70.29%	29.71%
2009	2790	2287	78.32%	21.68%

Source: Ministry of Education and Human Resources, 2011, p 5

These reports show that the PVE sector is not fulfilling its aim of channelling our children towards a vocational and technical sector which according to the World Bank is necessary to provide the manpower for our industries. My feeling is that the PVE has been created to separate those who succeed and those who fail so that they are not

physically in the same classroom. The different reforms have tried to reconcile the PVE and the main stream at some point in time but since the reforms have never been fully implemented, the PVE sector seems to be devalorised and may be the cause of school dropouts from the PVE sector as shown in Table 1.10.

1.3.3.7 Evaluation of the Mauritian education system

Primary education ends with the CPE after six or seven years of schooling. However, for those who succeed, the road to secondary formal education is open for five or seven more years. The children may stop at the end of the School Certificate examination (SC) or continue until the Cambridge Higher School Certificate Examination (HSC). However, apart from being a certification assessment, the CPE is also highly selective as it gives access to regional secondary schools. Parents want the best schools for their children and as a result, the need to succeed in the examination and get a good ranking/grading has made of the examination a “rat race” (Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, 2001). It is important to succeed because first, it determines the type and quality of secondary school that will be obtained. Second, the certificate is also a valuable asset for recruitment for employment later. The CPE decides whether children at 11 or 12 years old should be able to pursue their studies to higher levels or become apt only to learn a job. This situation seems to favour those children who have been brought up by parents whose main early aim is for their children to succeed brilliantly at the CPE examination. Working class parents also have as primary aim the schooling of their children but their aim regarding schooling may not be the same.

However, the education system, as alluded to in section 1.3.2 seems to be getting more elitist in nature where quality of education seems to prevail over access. As such, the educational reforms tend to favour children having facilities and resources to adapt to the changing system as opposed to those children who seem not to adapt to the system, despite several remedial programmes at their disposal.

If out-of-school children are illiterate as shown by the study of ODEROI (2008) and the PVE assessment in Table 1.7, it is evident that children cannot adapt to the education system as it is. We have seen in all reform documents (1.3.2) that the education system is marred with inefficiencies and that was the reason why a new reform is proposed on a regular basis (or at every change of government). Could it be that the education system

favours children of different social status? Since the different reforms have led towards an improvement in the quality of learning, is it possible that by so doing it has prejudiced working-class children?

It is possible that several policies in the education system prejudice working-class children. One such issue is the incompatibility of the language of instruction with the home language. The language of instruction in Mauritius is English, except for French which is taught in French. The mother tongue of most Mauritians is Creole (a language that originated as a mixed language used by the slaves to communicate with their masters) or Bhojpuri (a language from the North-Eastern part of India, adapted by Indo-Mauritians). According to Sonck (2008), French is spoken at home by approximately 7% of the population (mostly descendants of the French colonisers), whereas English is the official language used by the Government, in education, in the civil service and for all official transactions. English is mostly spoken at home by well-to-do Indian families and by expatriates but it is rarely used at home by the islanders. The use of English is restricted to “basic vocabulary and formulaic expressions” (Sonck, 2008, p. 39). When in 1998 the Ministry of Education declared that the mother-tongue could be used with younger children at primary school, many parents opposed this policy and were against the use of Creole in schools. That was because they were aware of the importance of English and French in the International environment and also because of the “fact that the knowledge of these languages could lead to social promotion” (Sonck, 2008, p. 41; Khan, 2013). As a result, although some teachers avoid using the mother tongue in school they revert to using French to facilitate communication and teaching. Tirvassen (1993) tells us that once the children attend primary school, the parents start using French at home with their siblings. This shows the power that affluent parents have over the education system in Mauritius. Therefore the use of languages in our schools is closely linked to social promotion and social status. How do our working children cope with this situation? Is the schooling system unequal? It seems that inequity is embedded already in policy decisions, some of which date back to the Education Ordinance of 1957 (Sonck, 2008; Ankiah-Gungadeen & Samuel, 2014, p. 58) which states that:

In the lower classes of ... primary schools up to and including Standard III, any one language may be employed as the language of instruction, being a language which in the opinion of the Minister is most suitable for the pupils. In Standards IV, V and VI of the government and aided primary schools the medium of instruction

shall be English and conversation between teacher and pupils shall be carried on in English.

However, there is still no consensus regarding the use of languages in our schools as a medium of transmission. Some advocate that it would be harmful to the learning of other languages whilst others argue that its use could improve academic achievement (Bissoonaath, 1998). Nevertheless, the study shows a strong affinity of middle class and upper class children and parents to the French language, whilst working class children and parents use more the Creole language. We can see here how the education system, being a tool to social mobility can be used subtly by those in power. It was an issue that was raised by the World Bank (1985) that there is a bureaucracy that opposed change. We seem to see that there is more than the teaching and learning process that is taken into consideration in changing policy decisions and this issue is one indicator that will be investigated more profoundly in the literature review

1.4 Transition to lower secondary school

Lower secondary school age is usually defined as that which corresponds to lower secondary education in accordance the International Standard Classification of Education 1997 (ISCED97). In Mauritius, this age coincides with the end of primary schooling at 11/12 years old until the age of 16, the end of compulsory education. This period also corresponds to the age period in countries where The Consortium or Research on Educational Access Transition & Equity (CREATE) has worked, namely, in India, Sri Lanka, Malawi, Kenya, Nepal, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Mali, Tanzania and China. In Sri Lanka, India and Malawi, for example, although the Gross Enrolment Ratio shows a drastic increase over the years, the Net Enrolment ratio statistics show a sizeable gap (Table 1.11). GER is the “number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school age population corresponding to the same level of education” (UIS, 2019), glossary). A GER close to 100% indicates usually that a country can accommodate all the children of school age. NER is the “total number of students in the theoretical age group for a given level of education enrolled in that level, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group” (UIS, 2019), glossary). A difference with 100% defines the proportion of children who are not enrolled in the specific level of education. The table below illustrates the GER and NER of three countries, namely Sri Lanka, India and Malawi which

indicate an increase in the GER over the years and the gap between the GER and the NER for these countries.

Table 1.11: Gross enrolment ratio and net enrolment ratio

Sri Lanka				India				Malawi			
GER		NER		GER		NER		GER		NER	
Year	Value	Year	Value	Year	Value	Year	Value	Year	Value	Year	Value
1977	86.77	1977	78.48	1977	78.48	1971	61.32	1999	133.39	1999	96.24
1986	102.03	1986	98.32	1986	98.32	1990	77.45	2002	136.48	2002	98.12
2001	107.77	2001	99.73	2001	99.73	2000	79.77	2004	129.27	2004	97.43
2002	106.03	2002	99.92	2002	99.92	2001	79.63	2005	127.17	2005	97.55
2003	102.78	2003	99.62	2003	99.62	2002	79.23	2006	126.77	2006	96.91
2004	97.68	2004	96.85	2004	96.85	2003	83.80	2007	123.96	2007	92.58
2005	99.63	2005	97.25	2005	97.25	2007	91.29	2008	131.28	2008	97.06
2006	98.98	2006	96.60	2006	96.60	2008	91.01	2009	130.05	2009	97.
2007	98.39	2007	96.25	2007	96.25	2009	90.75	2010	136.75		
2008	97.41	2008	95.54	2008	95.54	2010	91.02	2011	138.98		
2009	95.08	2009	93.24	2009	93.24	2011	90.41	2012	140.16		
2010	99.71	2010	94.93	2010	94.93	2012	91.57	2013	145.88		
2011	99.74	2011	95.08	2011	95.08	2013	89.50	2014	146.51		
2012	100.10	2012	95.37	2012	95.37						
2013	100.65	2013	96.38	2013	96.38						
2014	101.27	2014	97.18	2014	97.18						

Source: worked figures

These figures, however, show a gradual dropout rate at higher grade levels. For example, in Malawi, “although over enrolment in Grade 1 is persisting year after year, the proportion of students graduating from Grade 8 has remained fairly similar despite a dramatic increase in total enrolments, and remains about a quarter of those enrolled in Grade 1” (CREATE, 2011, p. 18). Mauritius also shows a significant number of dropouts when comparing the GER and NER of the country from 2008 to 2017, as shown in Table 1.12

Table 1.12: Gross enrolment ratio and net enrolment ratio for Mauritius

GER		NER	
Year	Value	Year	Value
2008	103.79	2008	96.68
2009	102.79	2009	96.59
2010	102.79	2010	96.51
2011	102.99	2011	96.48
2012	103	2012	93.66
2013	101.96	2013	96.03
2014	102.45	2014	96.16
2015	102.92	2015	96.14
2016	102.45	2016	94.94
2017	101.55	2017	95.81

In order to facilitate research in children dropouts, CREATE has developed a five-zone model of exclusion, shown in Figure 1.4. These are explained in 1.4.1.

One of the findings of the consortium reveals that children who are out of school are excluded from education because they drop out and not because they do not enrol. Most children below the age of 15 who are currently out of school, according to the findings, have attended school but have not completed basic education (CREATE, 2008). Yet, the children in my study are those who have completed primary schooling and are at a transition phase to join lower secondary education or are in the PVE and dropped out. In other words, these children who are in the Zones 4 and 5 of CREATE zones of exclusion. Why do children who have had primary education in countries where education is compulsory, drop out before the end of lower secondary education or drop out before embarking on lower secondary education?

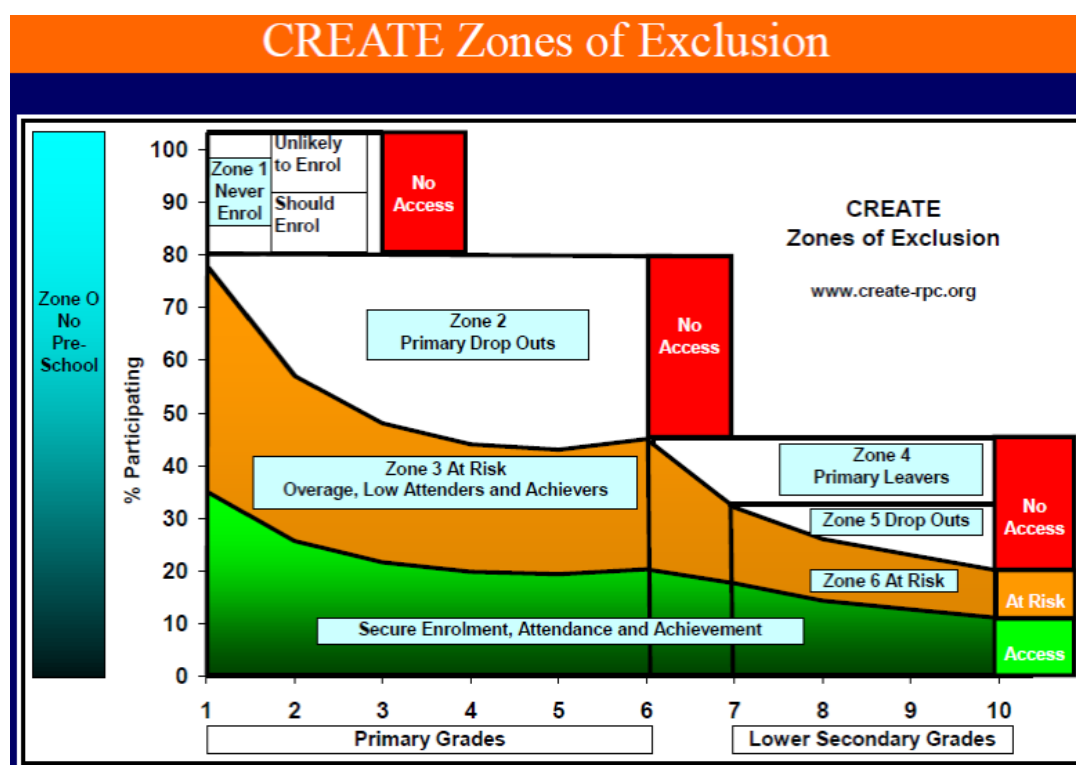


Figure 1.4: Zones of exclusion proposed by CREATE

Source: Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions & Equity, CREATE. (2011, p. 12).

1.4.1 The Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transition & Equity

The Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transition & Equity (CREATE) is a research programme consortium whose purpose is to conduct research to improve access to education in developing countries (CREATE, 2011). The lead partners of CREATE is the Centre for International Education of the University of Sussex and the partner organisations are from Bangladesh, India, South Africa, Ghana and the United Kingdom. The team of researchers have produced a large amount of publications including books, journals monographs and policy briefs. The purpose of these researches and publications is to provide more insight as to why millions of children from Africa and South Asia do not complete full basic education. Completing full basic education will determine the type of development these countries will take in the future. The different researchers give an insight in how much of progress has been made and how much more needs to be done to provide basic education to all children and on the political economy of educational reforms (CREATE, 2011). In analysing the changing patterns of inclusion and

exclusion, there is a lot to learn in how policy and practice should evolve to attain the goals of education for all.

CREATE proceeds by “conducting large scale empirical work at community and school level, analysing cross national data sets, complemented by smaller scale case studies and qualitative enquiries” (CREATE, 2011, p. 6). This is done in order to develop and dialogue with the policy making so that universal access to basic education is reached, in line with the MDGs and the Dakar convention to provide education for all. The vision adopted by the researchers from CREATE concerns “attendance, enrolment, progression at the appropriate age, achievement of learning goals, equitable access to opportunities to learn and availability of an adequate learning environment” (CREATE, 2011, p. 10).

The research programmes concern an expanded vision including “local access to safe schools with an appropriate environment for learning, admission and progression at an appropriate age, regular attendance, access to secondary education, learning outcomes that meet national norms and socially equitable access to affordable educational services of quality” (CREATE, 2011, p. 10). The research outputs target “pathways to access research monographs (on 12 themes), country analytic reviews, research reports and policy briefs, community and school studies, changing patterns of access, political economy of education for all” (CREATE, 2011, p. 10). The themes that are used to produce monographs are “the changing patterns of access, health nutrition and disability, drop out and push out, migration, seasonality and nomads, small schools and multi-Grade, transition to secondary, educational quality and school processes, equity, poverty and exclusion, private and non-state providers, planning and governance, aid architecture and the political economy of education for all” (CREATE, 2011, p. 10).

In order to conduct its research, CREATE has developed a model of zones of exclusions as shown in Figure 1.4. The model traps participation of children in terms of grades in order to obtain the groups that drop out. The different zones are: in Zone 1, those who never attended school and who are “excluded on livelihoods, location, civil status, disability, social stigma or other vulnerabilities” (CREATE, 2011, p.12). In Zone 2, children excluded at initial entry, who dropout or fail to complete the full cycle. Zone 3 contains those who are at risk, also called ‘silently-excluded’. Zone 4 concerns those who fail to move to lower secondary because they do not qualify, or because of cost of education or because school is out of reach. Zone 5 includes those who drop out from

secondary education. Zone 6 includes those at risk of dropping out from the secondary education and Zone 0 includes children excluded from preschool.

There are different causes for exclusion. CREATE tells us that these causes can be “individual and household characteristics, community level attributes, school level features and aspects of local and national level educational administration and resource availability” (CREATE, 2011, p. 14). When all these causes interact with each other, there is meaningful and equitable access. This can be summarised as individual (characteristics and agency), household (characteristics and agency), community (social, political, economic and political), educational governance and resources and school quality (process and outcome). Educational access concerns both the demand and the supply and when educational policy concentrate only on one aspect, then there is an imbalance. Policy should also touch the supply side of provision, i.e. where school quality is low and opportunity cost is high. When access is unevenly given, equitable access is compromised (CREATE, 2011). CREATE shows in its report (2011) how it has used the zones of exclusion to conceptualise starting points and key issues in Bangladesh, India, Ghana and South Africa and a cross country comparison shows how in different zones, how enrolment rates and drop-out rates vary from country to country. This research programme will be of utmost importance in my study as it concerns mainly children who are in zones 4 and 5, i.e those who fail to transit to lower secondary and those who stay and complete lower secondary basic education.

1.5 Out-of-school children in Mauritius

No specific literature or Mauritian statistics account for dropouts from the Mauritian education system. The island is not an exception to the rule as, despite much effort being made towards compulsory enrolment of students for basic education, there are still out-of-school children. In 2014, the number of children not attending primary or secondary school amounted to 3,539 (Indexmundi, 2014, Source: UNESCO). Figures representing school dropouts in Mauritius, however, are not available on the Statistics Mauritius reports or website. Nevertheless, following a question set in Parliament in 2010 regarding school dropouts, Dr The Honourable Bunwaree, the then Minister of Education, was informed by the Member of Parliament, Honourable Mr Obeegadoo, that “there are some 6000 out-of-school children (OOSC) of primary school going age” (Hansard (No. 1B/339), 2010), a figure not contested by the minister. However, what

does that figure indicate? Are they dropouts for all compulsory school age and/or for one year or over how many years? In the absence of official figures though, it is very confusing to find the exact number of school dropouts in Mauritius.

As my study concerns children who have sat for CPE examinations and then dropped out, I have worked out the figures from education statistics 2013 for children who have sat for the CPE examination in 2012. Statistics Mauritius 2013 shows that 17,221 school candidates at the first sitting took the examination and 13232 children passed, i.e. 3,989 failures. From the second sitting 1,772 passed out of 4,459, i.e. 2,687 failed. By working out the figures provided by Statistics Mauritius 2013 and represented in Table 1.1, 2,197 children from 3989 first timers joined PVE I in 2013. From the 2687 repeaters who are eligible, only 2,622 joined PVE I. We can assume that 1,792 children from the first timers and 65 from the repeaters did not join PVE I in 2013 (as shown in Table 1.2). Furthermore, 472 children transiting from PVE I 2012 to PVE II 2013 also dropped out as shown by the figures; 435 children transiting from PVE II to PVE III also dropped out. There is a total of 2764 children who have dropped out from school in 2013 only during the transition from CPE to PVE III. Data has been obtained from Education statistics, 2013 and have been worked out as shown in Table 1.1 and Table 1.2. Worked figures in Table 1.1 show that 4593 repeaters of CPE sat for the primary education examination and 2777 failed for a second time and are all eligible to join PVE 1. Only 2510 of them joined PVE 1 (meaning that 267 dropped out). In the same year 296 children from PVE 2 and 179 children from PVE 3 students dropped out for year 2012. This amounts to a total of 742 children who dropped out from school after their CPE in 2012.

These figures show that there is a group of children who do not enrol for the prevocational (PVE) and do not attend any form of formal schooling and, therefore, fail to transit between the primary sector and the eventual secondary sector. The worked figures show that, as per the records, 742 out-of-school children of an age to attend compulsory education have dropped out, which amounts to 3.74 % of the concerned student population. Though this figure might represent a small percentage of the population, it nevertheless represents what we consider as the marginalised of the Mauritian society. Unfortunately, there is no detailed breakdown description within these statistics. For example, we are yet to know where the OOSC come from, which schools have they attended, what is their family status, their level of failures. If the aim

of education is to develop a child physically, mentally, morally and cognitively, what levels of development have these children reached? We are in addition interested to know what the life experiences of these children are. Could these experiences have served as a kind of “push-out, pull-out or fall-out” in the lives of these children? These 2,764 children are all below the legal age of 16 years and should have been in a formal school. SAFIRE (2012) claims that a significant number of these children are on the streets. Adolescents Non-Formal Education Network (ANFEN), a network of informal institutions offering non-formal education to out-of-school children through its 17 members had a total number of 630 adolescents of lower secondary school age following informal education courses in 2007 (ANFEN, 2007). This figure has increased to 1,119 adolescents in 20 institutions in 2009 (ANFEN, 2009). This suggests that despite their dropping out of school, some youths are perhaps still interested in pursuing alternative forms of education and/or development. ANFEN is not the only network that provides access to out-of-school children. Others such as Caritas and Morning Star NGO (names anonymised) also provide care and informal education to out-of-school children in Mauritius.

These NGOs may point to an increased number of OOSC. A closer look at the Table 1.1 and Table 1.2 shows that out of the 4,819 children who joined PVE I in 2013, only 3,662 have transited to PVE II in 2014, hence showing a dropout of 1,157 children from PVE I. If the sector which is going to provide the necessary manpower to the country is not able to retain the children in its midst, then there must be a problem somewhere as a fair amount of the children have joined informal institutions. This study will look closer to this issue.

1.5.1 The role of non-formal institutions in the educational setting.

As mentioned above, non-formal institutions play an important role in the educational setting in Mauritius, especially for school drop-outs. The role of these NGOs is that they accommodate children below the age of 16 who are not attending primary or secondary formal institutions hence school-dropouts. These children who drop-out very often have learning disabilities. Even though a report published by the Ministry of Education & Human Resources (2006, p. 11) acknowledges that “the concept of children with special educational needs does not only include children with handicaps but also covers those children who are failing in school for any reason that might impede the child’s optimal

progress”, this policy has not always been put in practice. Hence, the school drop-outs are very often left on their own despite the 16-year compulsory education policy. And yet, according to the report, only children with special educational needs due to disabilities have received attention through the SENs policy published in 2006. There is no policy for children failing the grades and not reaching optimal progress within the compulsory age of education and it is quite fortunate that the informal institutions come as a substitute to fill the breach left by our education policy. Hence, this explains the need for non-formal education institutions in Mauritius. It seems that such a policy has been nullified by the NYCBE of 2014 but this is beyond the scope of this study.

One such NGO for non-formal institutions is the Adolescent Non Formal Education Network (ANFEN), which consists of a network of non-formal institutions functioning all around the island, especially in the disadvantaged areas where the ZEP schools are found, as shown in Figure 1.3. ANFEN is a registered NGO by the Republic of Mauritius as testified by the directory of NGO’s (NGO’s e-directory, 2016). It is a network of 15 non-formal institutions, also known as centres, “which promotes informal education for school drop-outs” (Acttogether, 2015). As at 2014, ANFEN catered for nearly 1100 children between the age of 11 to 18. Actually in 2019, ANFEN has under its care 1000 children of 12 to 18 years of age who have dropped-out from school. ANFEN provides several services to their different centres, namely the service of a pedagogical facilitator, child psychologists, counsellors and social workers.

The pedagogical facilitator prepares the inclusive curriculum based on the thematic pedagogy approach in the following subjects, namely literacy, numeracy, arts and crafts and computer literacy . ANFEN has a written pedagogy which is in the process of recognition by the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA), the only authority that can recognise qualifications obtained from all parts of the world. The thematic pedagogy is shared by the 3 pedagogical facilitators to the animators (unqualified staff of the centres) who in turn act as providers of the said pedagogy. All the centres affiliated to ANFEN provide wholly or partly the thematic approach to pedagogy. “Thematic approach is a way of teaching and learning, whereby many areas of the curriculum are connected together and integrated into one theme” (Varun, 2014, p. 1). This approach covers themes like home, environment, shopping, banking etc.

ANFEN also provides the services of contracted psychologists, counsellors and social workers to the centres. These are posted in different regions and the centres can ask for the intervention of such persons when needed. Usually one psychologist is attributed per centre and there are six counsellors that share the different centres. Thus, ANFEN offers not only pedagogical facilities but also provides psycho-social following to the children. The social workers are usually working in each region in the afternoons when the parents are available. They ensure a perfect co-ordination between the school, the parents, the community. Matters such as absenteeism, violence, health, malnutrition are closely monitored and in some cases children are referred to the social services (Private or State owned). Each centre may also provide extra-curricular activities to the children in their centres and ANFEN co-ordinates the organisation of tournaments intra-centre. Thus, each centre has its own internal management and running of the centres and benefit from the expertise of the services provided by ANFEN. Children are mostly prepared towards employability in coordination with the Mauritius Institute of Training and envelopment (MITD), who are providers of the National Certificates through the National Apprenticeship programme. Children of the study who have completed the CPE are usually already entitled to the NC1 certificate. All the services of ANFEN and the centres are funded by private organisations through the CSR programme. Apart from ANFEN, other non-formal institutions (group or standalone) are also active in the field to accommodate school drop-outs and they may have their own pedagogy or approach.

1.5.2 The school dropouts' or out-of-school children's profile

The phenomenon of out-of-school children (OOSC), commonly known as dropouts, is still under-researched in the formal Mauritian educational sphere. The term itself is not often used and is often mistaken to refer to “dropouts”, or “street children” or “prevocational children”. The Global Partnership in Education (2011, p. 4) defines out-of-school children as children who

“Do not have access to a school in their community;

Do not enrol despite the availability of a school;

Enrol but do not attend school;

Drop out of the education system.”

The sample of out-of-school children that I will be considering in this study is of those who have dropped out of the Mauritian education after having failed their Certificate of Primary Education (CPE). They have either opted not to be in a prevocational school or who cannot join a formal school, even though the legal age for compulsory education is up to the age of 16; or they may have joined the prevocational sector and then dropped out before the legal age. For the study, the participants I am targeting will be in the age range of 14 to 16. The group of children that concerns this study (my sample) is unaccounted for by our formal educational system.

- They are boys or/and girls aged between 14 and 16;
- They are not repeating the Standard 6 again;
- They are not in the normal (academic and prevocational) stream of lower secondary education;
- They may have been prevocational students;
 - i.e. students who have twice failed the Certificate of Primary Education and who were following a prevocational programme in a lower secondary sector, but have dropped out before the end of the four-year programme;
- They are not street children;
 - I have chosen the term “not being a street child”, because I want to make the distinction between school dropouts and street children in the Mauritian context.

The Service D’Acompagnement, de Formation, D’Insertion et Rehabilitation de l’Enfant (SAFIRE, 2012) have their own definition of street children which they acknowledge as being ‘children on the streets’ and/or ‘children working on the streets’. According to them, their definition of street children corresponds to one of the following criteria:

“Criterion 1: Child above 15 years old, not going to school and not working;

Criterion 2: Child below 16 years old and is working for economic reasons even if going to school;

Criterion 3: Attending school but chronically absent from school for unjustified reasons (e.g. for more than 10 days per school semester);

Criterion 4: Both parents absent in the lives of the child (dead, physical separation expatriation for economic reasons, etc.)”.

(SAFIRE, 2012, p. iv)

Hence, according to SAFIRE, these are children who have been driven onto the streets by several factors such as poor parenting, poor socioeconomic situations of the family and, therefore, as a result of lack of guidance, the children roam the streets. It may be that some of the street children are out-of-school children but they are not the focus of my study. I reiterate here, that all children that I consider as OOSC are living in a family, whether it be traditional, conventional families of two biological parents or in re-composed families with one biological parent, or with a single biological parent or living in foster homes or sometimes even in youth centres. Some children have been branded as “children out-of-control” and very often they have been placed by authorised State institutions in foster care or in shelters but none of them are living on the streets. Children are placed in foster care or in shelters because it is considered that their home is no longer a place of safety for them. Furthermore, the OOSC are all attending some sort of informal educational institution for further literacy programmes. These institutions provide an alternative to academic schooling provided by formal educational institutions from where the children have dropped out.

In this paragraph I have made clear that the profile of out-of-school children as the phenomenon has a much wider connotation. It may be that the life experiences of the different types of school dropouts are different; hence by studying this particular profile, I may be shedding some light on a very specific type of school dropouts.

SECTION B

1.6 Personal biographical motivation for this study

My experience in the education sector: 11 years as a learner in formal schooling, 30 years as an educator and 8 years as assistant director of a secondary school, has provided particular interpretations of learners and learning. As a child, I believe I have learnt more about the values, cultures of countries through the comic books of Tintin and Snowy, rather than from my formal geography textbook. I do not think that the textbooks were a problem; rather it was the schooling system that was problematic. My learning experiences were enriched through informal learning with important lessons from my friends, family, and environment rather than sitting in class and learning a pre-prepared formal curriculum which, according to me, did not seem to make sense or did not connect with real life situations. According to Bowles & Gintis (1976) and Willis (1997), the capitalist system advocates that the only route to success is in the world of work and that education cannot be obtained outside the formal schooling system. This could be argued to be also valid in Mauritius where the formal education system tends to compel students to the rigours of the world of work. The Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) (2007, p. 27) informs us that

The aim of all reforms in education in Mauritius is to prepare children to be competent in the world market and be more employable in emerging sectors in the Mauritian economy.

For the purpose of this study, I will be referring to the curriculum framework of 2006 as the OOSC are the ones concerned with this policy. When re-designing the curriculum, the National Primary Schools Curriculum Framework (2006) has taken into consideration changes in socioeconomic and technological domains. This meant that the national curriculum framework had to be readjusted to empower Mauritian children to face global international changes. As such, mere academic performance was overlooked in order to “think more in terms of professionalising our manpower resources and cultivating a spirit of entrepreneurship” (The National Primary Schools Curriculum Framework, 2006, p. 6). This national curriculum policy of 2006 was in line with the recommendations of the World Bank of 1985 and this recommendation keeps coming back in most reforms. The focus of most reforms as shown in 1.3.2 aims at the abolition

of the CPE, the introduction of a nine-year schooling and more access to vocational and technical education to primary school failures which will provide the manpower of the future development of Mauritius. On the other hand, the reforms have gradually increased the quality of learning where the less able are not given enough time to adapt. Those who could not adapt were channelled to the prevocational and technical sector. Although remedial education was provided, the curriculum and the education system gradually divided the education sector between those who would attend the normal stream and those who would attend the PVE. It was a matter of either/or and no place was left for a choice. This rigid pattern of accessing schools is addressed in more detail in 1.3.2. Even though new subjects have been added aiming at the holistic development of the child, the selection criteria for a CPE success has not changed. Children are encouraged to be more creative and talented but the criteria for a CPE pass focuses on the academic subjects only. What are the chances given to those children who are weak academically but talented in creativity or to the late developers?

Having in mind the future development of children to be prospective entrepreneurs is quite a laudable project, and Robinson (2011) says that this can be done through the development of creativity. Children, according to Robinson, are naturally creative; only the appropriate space has to be provided for the blooming of children's creativity. Nevertheless, our schooling system forces children into a nasty playground where obedience, private tuitions, rote learning (learning towards the exams) and boredom rule; this conformity, however, does not really appeal to children as expressed by Gray (2009a), who compares schools to prisons where children between 6 to 16 years are compulsorily made to endure rules imposed by a system and where they have no say in the decision-making process. Robinson (2011, p. 20) tells us that everywhere, governments are pouring funds into educational reforms (which is also the case of Mauritius, see 1.3.2) where

policy makers typically narrow the curriculum to emphasise a small group of subjects, tie schools up in a culture of standardised testing and limit the discretion of educators to make professional judgments about how and what to teach.

These reforms are masking the skills and talents needed to promote creativity and yet the decision makers are doing it in the name of new economic demands.

The number of school dropouts among the children who have failed the CPE and attending PVE is quite considerable. These children were expected to be trained manpower for the future economic development of the country and yet they could not cope with the vocational and technical training they were being given. What is the reason why children drop out from school? There must be a reason why children who are offered an opportunity to learn a job leave school before reaching the legal age. They are not leaving school because they want to earn a living but they are leaving because they want a different type of education provided by the informal setting, which seems to be more of an alternative to their agenda. Gray (2009b) tells us that children are made to believe that school will fulfil their dreams and therefore children must not consider schools as prisons. However, despite the fact that children prefer their freedom, they are forced to be in a cage-like structure because of their age. They have to accept whatever is being told to them otherwise they are punished if they fail to comply (Gray, 2009b). What is being offered to them in terms of curriculum that will fulfil their dreams? The fact that OOSC continue their schooling informally in specific NGO's, may have different meaning. They may be forced by their parents to attend an institution because legally they have not reached the age of 16 or there may be other reasons why they attend such institutions. This comforts the idea that OOSC feel the need to be schooled otherwise rather than through the traditional system and that dropping-out from formal education may be a partial solution to their problems.

I have recently had an experience working with out-of-school children (OOSC) in an NGO network providing informal teaching to the learners who have completed their primary schooling but have not progressed further in the formal schooling system. The NGO provided the services of pedagogical facilitators in informal schooling, psychologists, and social workers. This concept of OOSC was new to me: I became aware that there seems to be a lot of assumptions (rightly or wrongly) about these children. Many associate OOSCs with poverty, broken families, limited intelligence, socially inappropriate behaviour or having parents who are uncaring.

However, I found them to be not different from me or other children who were disillusioned with the formal schooling system. Having been labelled by formal school teachers as failures and non-ideal pupils (Becker, 1951, 1963; Hempel-Jorgensen, 2009), these OOSC tend to paradoxically enjoy a higher social popularity status afforded to

them by those who break the rules (other children in the same situation in class or the school). For me as a student, I became a rule breaker because of the status I obtained from my peers, and not because I was undisciplined. The status that I could not get through the academic route was obtained from sports and being undisciplined. Being a rule breaker was a choice for me as I used it to antagonise my teachers. Hargreaves (1967); Willis (1977); Lacey (1970) suggest that those (children) labelled as troublemakers tend to be placed in lower streams and these, in turn, will seek out the company of those in the same situation to be defiant towards the school and to be termed as non-conformist delinquents, thus forming subcultures. I tend to disagree with these researchers because by being a non-conformist, my action was not a passive, submissive one, but an action full of meaning and of defiance towards those in power, my teachers, the school authorities and even my parents. By being a nuisance value for the school, it was easy for those in power to label such non-conformists as “children beyond control” by the system. By so doing, it became easier to symbolically exclude children with social problems from the school setting.

Though I was once part of this victim status thrust upon me when I chose as a young person to be non-conformist, I decided to fight back; relying on the common strengths received from others in my life who were supportive and which I will call the significant ones: family, guardians, peers, my home environment and caring teachers who were all part of what Bronfenbrenner (1989) refers to as the ecological systems which enable children’s success in education and schooling. This theory later became known as the “bio-ecological system”. This theory emphasises that the child’s own biology is the primary ground where development starts. This development is, in turn, influenced by biographical factors in his/her immediate family/community environment, and the societal landscape. Changes or conflicts in any one layer will ripple throughout other layers. To study a child’s development then, we must look not only at the child and his/her immediate environment, but also at the interaction of the larger environment as well. He argues that a child’s development is affected by the different complex layers of environment which he termed the micro-system, the meso-, the exo-, the macro- and the chrono-system (ibid.).

Pirner (2011) argues that achievement gaps are not only the result of what happens in the classroom, but are the result of powerful forces within and across each element in a

wider interconnected environment that will influence the teaching and learning process. He identifies examples of these elements as the home, the church, the parents' workplace, the country's culture and goes on to say that these influence both the child as a learner but also the teachers in their practice. By empirically probing the eco-system surrounding the OOSC, I hope to find out what may or may not sustain their endurance in formal schooling. This study therefore can provide useful information and contribute to the CREATE Zone 4 model of zone of exclusion.

But beyond the theory of Bronfenbrenner (1998), this study will also investigate how the sociological, psychological, cultural and cognitive factors are moulded in the de-jure and de-facto issues upon the components of the eco-system. These factors will inform us how the different effects or combination of effects contribute to the 'push-out, pull-out or fall-out' issues that may influence children's decision.

1.7 Objectives of this study

The Global Partnership in Education (2011) advances reasons such as income poverty, poor health and nutrition, disability, gender, ethnicity, child labour, migration, geographical disadvantages, cultural factors and situations of fragility and conflict as possible reasons that hinder access to lower education. Based on the assumption that children do not drop-out of their own will but are pushed out from school, the purpose of this present study is to challenge to the dominant extant literature foregrounding factors leading to drop out. Instead this study explores how the participants experienced these forces of influences within their homes, communities and schooling. I wish to understand, in interaction with the 5 systems of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory (1994),

1. what the experiences of pre-primary and primary schooling were; how these experiences have affected/or not their choices to be "out-of-school".
2. what in the life experiences of the out-of-school children's have contributed to their exclusion at lower secondary schooling; whether these life experiences allowed self-imposed exclusions, or are the result of silent exclusion (Motala, 2011) and/or the result of symbolic exclusion.

3. how their attempts to choose opportunities for resisting their movement out of the formal schooling system unfolded; why these attempts unfolded the way they did;
4. how and why these strategies did or did not lead to disaffection to formal school to the point to be out-of-school.

Some of these key constructs embedded within these questions above will be explored in more detail in the literature review/ theoretical framework chapters (chapter 2) of the thesis report.

1.8 Research questions

1. What are the life experiences of dropping out within the Mauritian educational (pre-primary/primary schooling) context?
2. How do these life experiences develop an understanding of dropping out in the Mauritian educational context?
3. Why do these life experiences influence or do not the dropping out in the Mauritian context in the way they do/not?

1.9 Rationale for the study

The Education for All Campaign (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals carried out by the UNESCO and UNICEF project have focused the world's attention on ensuring that no child is excluded from receiving primary education. However, despite global efforts to promote universal primary education, there were still 115 million children of primary school age out of school in 2001/02 (UNESCO, 2005). The sub-Saharan Africa region has the highest absolute numbers of out-of-school children. I believe that my study will contribute to developing an understanding of some of the possible obstacles that out of school children have experienced of their past schooling careers and this might influence whether they sustain their engagement or not with formal schooling. Are more creative opportunities for self-development and growth yielded by being out of school? That question will be explored.

Furthermore, despite international efforts being made for children to attend primary schooling, there is also adolescents who are excluded from lower secondary schooling.

Figures from UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) report (2010) mention that 71 million out-of-school adolescents are excluded from lower secondary education worldwide. Increasingly, EFA goals have been extended to focus not exclusively on universal primary education (UPE), but also the kinds of challenges of transition into the secondary school system.

Though this figure (Table 1.2) obtained on school dropouts during the transition from primary to lower secondary is minimal as compared to other African countries, it touches the needier and the more vulnerable children of Mauritian society. It appears that these children, because of their precariousness, find themselves in an educational system that most probably does not cater for their needs. It seems that all conditions unite to increase the quality of learning as shown by the different reforms. Can it be the reason that pushes away the vulnerable children from schooling? They do not seem to have the economic resources to migrate from where they live in order to get access to a school considered to be high performing schools or to attend a private fee-paying school. They are perhaps forced (because of the regional policy) to attend a Priority Education Zone (ZEP) school because they live in regions called “pockets of poverty”, and, thus, they may already become labelled as low performers because the school is considered a low-performing school. The language of instruction and the language of assessment are not their mother tongue. Generally, they may not have the economic facilities to take private tuition. Are these the reasons for their dropping out?

Hempel-Jorgensen (2009, p. 1) considers them as having the profile of non-ideal students. She believes that “how the children view themselves as learners in relation to what they consider the ideal learner may have a significant impact on their educational motivation and aspirations”. Furthermore, these vulnerable children come from regions considered to be “pockets of poverty”, or from regions such as Port Louis or Black River as shown in as shown in Figure 1.1 and Figure 1.2.. In these same regions, there is also a high concentration of concentration of ZEP schools ([Figure 1.1: Educational Institutions in Mauritius by Zone](#)

[Source: Digest of Education Statistics 2012](#)

[Figure 1.1](#)). This leads us to question whether there is a residential segregation in Mauritius. If such is the case, then, Rothstein (2013, p. 1) tells us “that social and economic disadvantage depresses student performance and that by concentrating these students in racially and economically homogenous schools further depresses them”.

Although the policy of regionalisation (explained in 1.3.2) of the primary education system is a laudable project, we forget that by so doing, we create a system that segregates access to schools of unequal standards. According to Rothstein (2013) we forget that “residential segregation is actually the result of racially motivated law, public policy, and government-sponsored discrimination rather than being an accident of economic circumstance, personal preference, and private discrimination”. This, Selvon (2012, p. 122) explains is a result of the action of political parties which chose to “pitch half of the Mauritian population against the other half on the basis of perceived ethnic majority against perceived ethnic minorities”. This seems to be confirmed by the failure of the reform by Honourable Minister Parsuramen as he explains in his report (Parsuramen, 1997). Rothstein (2013) explains that as a result, there are fewer health care facilities, more absenteeism, more illiterate parents with fewer children committed to frequent reading or exposed to complex languages such as English and French. However, several beach-hawkers have, on the other hand, mastered the basics of other foreign languages to communicate with tourists to sell their products. By conducting this research, I will try to find out if the phenomenon of OOSC is, possibly, the result of a residential segregation where the disadvantaged attend less performing schools and the advantaged attend “star schools”.

I further add to the debate that it may be possible that children go to school, not because they like schooling, but rather because the child has no other choice than to comply. For Willingham (2009), children do not like school because the brain is not meant for thinking. According to him, “people are naturally curious, but they are not naturally good thinkers; unless the cognitive conditions are right, people will avoid thinking” (Willingham, 2009, p. 4). Thinking, according to Willingham, has three properties, namely, it is “slow” as it cannot process immediately what is visually encountered; it is “effortful”, as thinking asks for a lot of concentration while other tasks can still be performed when seeing; it is “uncertain”, as very often the solution might be far from being correct whereas seeing brings one as close to what is visually there. Hence, instead of thinking, people rely on memory of a task that has been performed earlier and the memory is more reliable, provides quick answers with less effort, Willingham (2009) says. Succeeding is pleasant and simply having the answer without knowing how is not gratifying. Yet when people happen to like thinking, it has to be accompanied by work that is gratifying in both curiosity and solution. Hence, what

if out-of-school children or children after all, do not like school because there is less arousal of curiosity and more problem solving issues in schooling?

Nevertheless, Gray (2009a) insists that school is a prison where there is no freedom for children. Children are forced to go to school because of their age, are told what they have to do and punished if they fail or do not comply. He asks the question that if schools are prisons and, hence, unnecessary, because children learn better through play and freedom, then what will happen to this huge business called education which employs such a lot of people and experts and which is so embedded in our culture? Are organisations such as UNESCO, UNDP, and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) also part of that huge enterprise that drives children to “prison” so that the business of education and schooling flourishes? Hence, if this is true, whose purpose does schooling serve? All these are questions to be investigated and answered through this thesis.

SECTION C

1.10 Structure of the thesis report

I have purposely used ‘parts’ to demarcate the three phases of this thesis.

- Part 1 comprises the pre-field work;
- Part 2 comprises the in-field work and
- Part 3 comprise the post-field analysis.

Furthermore, sub-categories of each chapter are demarcated through the consistent use of “sections” delineating the phases/issues within each chapter.

The structure of the whole thesis is presented in the main body of the report so as to facilitate the readability of this report.

This is further reinforced consistently in the Table of Contents (p. vi) of the thesis.

Chapter 1 offers the necessary contextual parameters of the study, and introduces the thesis. It also provides the gap that this thesis will try to bridge.

Chapter 2 presents a review of literature and the theoretical framework. The discussion of literature offers different explanations about the subject of my study that both local and international researchers have put forward regarding the experiences of out-of-school children. It explores how and why these experiences affect the children's schooling. The key concepts and theoretical framework based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory is elaborated in the same chapter which culminates with what literature says about the gaps in literature.

Chapter 3 exposes the research strategy that I have purposely used 'parts' to demarcate the three phases of this thesis.

- Part 1 comprises the pre-field work;
- Part 2 comprises the in-field work and
- Part 3 comprises the post-field analysis.

Furthermore, sub-categories of each chapter are demarcated through the consistent use of "sections" delineating the phases/issues within each chapter.

The structure of the whole thesis is presented in the main body of the report so as to facilitate the reading of this report. (p. 57)

This is further reinforced consistently in the Table of Contents (p. vi) of the thesis.

It will be used for the production of data. An account of how the study was designed and conducted is provided. It also describes the research methodology, sampling method, instruments, research field and problems encountered.

Chapter 4 presents the co-constructed narratives of four participants interviewed for the sake of the study. The four participants are all from the same NGO.

In chapter 5 there is a cross analysis of the narratives that were constructed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 6 presents an analysis of the cross-analysis which shows the different influences that emerged from the previous chapter. This chapter focuses on the in-school influences.

Chapter 7 also analyses the out-of-school and self-experiences of the children.

Chapter 8 concludes the study.

1.11 Chapter synthesis

In this chapter, I have discussed the background of the study. I have, first of all, presented education in the Mauritian context and the different reforms that have guided the education sector since the publication of the White Paper (1985). This is followed by the methods of enrolment and assessment. Next I have focused on the phenomenon of out-of-school children and tried to explain possible motives for how they happened to be out of school. Another area of interest is the disadvantaged regions of Mauritius from which most OOSC come and their school situation, i.e. the ZEP schools. I have also explored the possibility of a relationship between the ‘pockets of poverty’, the ZEP schools location and the regions where NGO’s are caring for the OOSC, and if does exist, what it tells us about the process of dropping out. I have also briefly mentioned the contents of the forthcoming chapters. In this chapter, I have equally made clear what my objectives were and presented my overarching critical research questions and what were my reasons for the study.

To sum up, I have situated the context of the study, the reasons why I needed to conduct it and what I wanted to find out.

CHAPTER 2

DEVELOPING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FROM THE EXTANT LITERATURE

2.1 Overview

We have seen in Chapter 1 that the official (formal) education system in Mauritius seems to be in line with international benchmarks of the EFA goals and the MDGs in their intention to combat exclusion in education. While Mauritius has an access rate of 100% at primary schooling, there is nevertheless, a concern about the number of school dropouts during and after primary schooling (UNESCO, 2015). However, the focus of the authorities has been directed towards making formal access to education a priority through legislating policy which permits every child access to free education, from early childhood to tertiary (UNESCO, 2015). This is supported by providing free transport for all school-going children to and from the school in their region. Furthermore, children of indigent areas have access to targeted schools where more material, financial, social and human resources are available in order to retain children in schooling until the age of 16 years, as prescribed by law (UNESCO, 2015; ODEROI, 2008). However, access to education does not guarantee success and therefore, children drop out from school throughout the 16 years of schooling.

If children are still dropping out despite all these attempts at enabling their participation in the schooling system, there needs to be a consideration of the factors that influence children to drop out. Dropping out of schooling is argued to involve a long process, where children slowly personally disengage from education for a range of reasons (Murray et al., 2014; Fredericks, Blumenfield & Paris (2004). But why do they drop out? Why is the practice different despite all what current literature says? Broadly speaking, research literature tends to attribute student drop out (or non-participation in formal schooling) to three groups of factors of disengagement: the socially related, the *institutional* school-related and the individual child-related influences. Therefore, this chapter will aim at assessing past and current literature on the topic of dropping out which will be critically reviewed in search of the missing gaps which these studies have not yet addressed. This has been achieved, taking into consideration the CREATE (2011)

project. In this present study I will be more concerned with the interactions and interrelations that exist between the social, the institutions and the self as I believe children's drop out is found in the inter-relation between the social, institutional and the self. The CREATE research explained that a balance in the interaction of the individual, household, community, policy and school quality is necessary to have meaningful equitable access. In particular, this study will foreground children's voices on the process of disengagement and/or their views of the interaction among the three levers of disengagement in relation to the socioeconomic, political, cultural factors influencing their drop out. Unlike most studies which foreground the school dropout from a systemic and institutional perspective, this study emphasises the lived experiences of children themselves as they navigate their personal processes (inside and outside schooling) which affect their dropping out of school. As such, issues from the practice will emerge.

Based on the three groups of factors of disengagement, I chose Bronfenbrenner's (1994) theory of bio-ecological development as a theoretical framework to guide the study design of this research project. The theory defines the child as embedded within multiple layers of influence, warranting self-selections of the degrees of capitulation or ascendancy over the ambient forces in their environment (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). The development of the child is enabled or constrained through varied interactions with these multiple forces. This theory allowed me to explore the different avenues in the life of a participant while taking into consideration the different macro-, meso- and micro-elements of the environmental context. This was further overlaid with the exo-systemic and chronological system outlined by Bronfenbrenner (1994). Based on a critique of Bronfenbrenner, a further analytical tool is proposed to explore the interrelationships between these varied layers of factors. This framework was used for the design of the instruments and the collection of data from the field.

2.2 Orientation to Chapter 2

The purpose of this chapter is to review what literature informs us about the interaction between the different constructs of disengagement that ultimately influence dropping-out from school. This chapter is made up of six sections. Section A highlights theoretical conceptions of the phenomenon of school dropout comparing it with other related terms, such as "school disengagement". Further, it questions locating the source of the

challenge as residing within children alone. Section B will highlight the *socially related* factors influencing dropping out from school. Section C puts emphasis on the *institution-related* factors influencing dropping out from school. Section D explores the individual factors influencing dropping out from school. Section E highlights the education policy and its influence on dropping out from school. This section also deals more with the policy decisions at a macro level over time. Section F presents the choice for a theoretical framework that was used for the study.

I have concluded with a synthesis of the chapter.

SECTION A

2.3 Conceptualising “out-of-school children” (OOSC), disengagement and dropping out from school: (Inter)national perspectives

Out Of School Children (OOSC) has already been defined in Chapter one (refer to 1.5) as children who, according to The Global Partnership in Education (2011) have dropped out of school before the compulsory age, which in the Mauritian context is 16 years old; furthermore, these children do not attend any type of formal education institutions. Children are expected to attend primary school up to the age of 11/12 years old, at the end of which they sit for the CPE examination, explained in chapter one at 1.3.3.2. This examination has now been replaced by the PSAC (see 1.3.2) (Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific research, 2015), introduced after the data production phase of this study and thus will not be taken into consideration in the analysis. The CPE examination serves as a selection process to access secondary schooling. However, children drop out of school during their primary schooling or after having sat for the CPE. Sometimes children might choose to drop out of formal schooling even after having joined secondary schooling in the normal stream or the prevocational stream (see Chapter 1). My study concerns children who have sat for the final CPE examination and dropped out before the age of 16.

Many researchers attribute dropout to a lack of engagement of children in schooling thus attributing engagement/disengagement as a child factor. However, children do not evolve in isolation and very often other actors of the schooling environment and home environment of the child seem to be forgotten in the process of disengagement.

Disengagement embraces not only children but also other actors such as teachers, administrators, the physical environment, the neighbourhood, the family, the parents and the peers. Fredericks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) suggest that when children are engaged, they are committed and involved in school activities and the learning process. This is supported by Newmann, Wehlage and Lamborn (1992, p. 11) who state that “engagement represented active involvement, commitment, and concentrated attention, in contrast to superficial participation, apathy, or lack of interest”. This process of disengagement is, according to an Australian governmental commissioned study, a slow process whereby children disengage at various levels and ultimately reach the culminating point of dropping out (Hancock & Zubrick, 2015). Therefore, disengagement is considered by these theorists as the absence of children’s involvement in schooling activities. These theorists suggest that the source of disengagement has psychological connections. However, they are not explicit about whether these psychological dispositions of children indeed are causal factors that lead to dropping out from school. Even though Hancock and Zubrick (2015) suggest that disengagement can be emotional, cognitive or behavioural, they do not advance any findings to show that children drop out because of these factors. These three studies above seem to tell us that disengagement from schooling is a child issue, where the child ‘chooses to’ get involved and be committed to schooling, and failure to do so ends up in slowly disengaging from schooling. It also seems to tell us that disengagement is a one-way process with a point of no return.

However, this interpretation of children as the sole source of the dropping out of school seems to be counter-intuitive to the repeated claims by parents, homes and families that schooling is indeed a valued activity. It seems that a positive rather than hostile disposition towards schooling prevails among most children who interpret schooling as having some benefits. Despite the fact that all literature point towards the child as being the ones who makes the choice to disengage, I tend to disagree that such is the case. Mauritius has a high enrolment rate in primary education. Statistics Mauritius tells us that in 2017 “the gross enrolment ratio works out to be at 97%, the same as the previous year” (Statistics Mauritius, 2017, p. 3). Families believe in the value of education, whether they are from the middle class or working class. Furthermore, education is compulsory and the law dissuades parents from not sending their child to

school up to the age of 16. Thus, if children ‘choose’ to drop out, then legal action can be taken against the family.

The ideas of school seen as a prison, (Gray,2009a), children liking creativity, (Robinson, 2011), or children not liking school because they do not like thinking, (Willingham, 2009), tend to reinforce the argument that because they do not like school, children disengage. I believe that it depends on what stance is taken. Affluent people will value schooling because of its promotion to a higher status. They make use of all the facilities and resources available for their children, facilities like star schools, star-motivated and result-oriented teachers, good residential facilities and resources; furthermore, teachers have a high perception of their children as being ideal children. The same facilities and resources are not made available to non-affluent people (ZEP schools, poor residential areas, teachers’ refusal to work with in low-performing school, teachers’ perception of deprived children and parents). These facilities are coupled with a parallel system of lucrative business of private tuition. It is easier for children of affluent people to afford to spend more for their children in private tuition since education is free. Private tuition is simply a repetition of class work and reiterated practice of past examination papers so that problem solving becomes easier through a series of repetitive practices to worked examples of questions set. Since the examination papers are adapted to answering towards the examination rather than understanding the logic of solving the problem, children of affluent parents find it easier to regurgitate learnt patterns, which are memorised during private tuition. Thus for these children school may not be seen as a prison but, for children of deprived areas, school becomes a prison because it compels them to learn what they do not want to learn because they do not see the purpose of it, and it does not allow space for creativity, talent expression and freedom.

And what of the family support? My experience in education as education officer and administrator has helped me to find out that family structures have a huge impact on children’s behaviour and performance. For Amato (1987), the type of family in which a child lives has a lot of influence on the general life pattern of the child. The support that children from affluent families receive is quite different to that from deprived families. Furthermore, Sun and Li (2011, p. 542) tell us that “as compared with children in two-biological-parent families, children growing up in single-parent families typically showed lower levels of academic achievement”. The lack of one or more biological

parent can influence children towards building their identity. This is reflected in low-academic performances and poor behaviour patterns and in lack of family support. Furthermore, the possibility for parents to be in unemployable situations impacts more on children from deprived areas. Furthermore, teachers' perceptions of deprived parents play a lot on how a child is accepted in class. Generally, it is believed that parents of low SES have a more unstable family type and the purpose of this research is also to find the veracity of the belief.

Yet, the idea of finding the usefulness of schooling is quite dependent on what have been the experiences of children during that time. Whittaker, Kenworthy and Crabtree (1998) in a survey conducted with 2,500 students, pointed out that 63% indicated that what made them happy in schools is friendship, and 33% responded that what made them unhappy was bullying. When asked what they considered a good teacher to be, 54% responded that it was someone who was happy, kind and understanding, whilst 44% indicated that they considered teachers who were hot-tempered and who shouted as bad. Literature shows that teachers' shouting is also a form of bullying. Hence, are children who are bullied and shouted at, happy in school? If they are not, as shown by the survey, then does that explain, in part, absenteeism, fall-out and disengagement in schooling? We must also be aware that if 54% said they were happy in school because of friendship, then, friends have also their importance in children's experiences of schooling.

Hence, children remain engaged because there is a purpose ahead for them and I believe that there may be further extenuating factors (from within the broader social environment and within the institutional setting of the schooling context) that influence children to psychologically disconnect from schooling. I have used the term 'disconnect' because I believe that there is a 'break between' the child and the school and this activates drop out. Selznick (2018, p. 2) refers to these disconnected learners as 'shut-down learners', i.e. "those children who become academically discouraged and disconnected from school over time". According to him, a crack in the foundation (at the lower level of schooling), lack of time and understanding, and strained family communications lead to "shut-down" learners. And yet these children, he suggests, can be recuperated so that they do not need to disengage or drop out.

Taylor and Parsons (2011) in a review of research literature in students' engagement into middle schools and high schools, concluded that learner engagement is linked with achievement, good behaviour and commitment to schooling. This definition clearly suggests that the codes of conduct of learners as defined by schooling environments, their achievement of grades throughout the schooling system, clearly has an influence on whether they choose to remain in schooling or not. These researchers emphasised that it was important to keep socioeconomically disadvantaged children engaged so that they may aim at higher education. This was a response to their view that such learners did not evidently see the worthwhileness in the project of schooling.

Heckman (2006, p. 1900) shifted the locus of blame on learner dropout to the home-setting environments: he described "disadvantaged (learners) as associated with poor parenting practices and lack of cognitive and non-cognitive stimulation". He advocated that learning skills should be inculcated at an early age, and that home environments that fail to stimulate the youth towards such skills place these children at a disadvantage. Thus, Heckman (2006) suggests that children's disengagement is not necessarily child-related and may be family-or socially related.

Stephens (1998) proposes three domains: the home, the economy and the school as being the main problems for access to and dropping-out of school by young Ghanaian girls and women. The cultural aspect shaping the home practice, such as fostering, cultural values, the work expected by girls in the home acted as barrier for more participation of girls in schooling. The relationship between the economy, more specifically between poverty and schooling was emphasised as being potentially 'economically' a wastage of time to attend school. Finally, teacher behaviour and teacher expectations leading to children experiencing difficulty and disappointment with schooling life was also mentioned as being a barrier to access. Thus, for Stephens (1998), dropping out from school was not necessarily child centered.

Willms (2003); Harris (2008); Willms, Friesen, and Milton (2009) were all concerned as to whether children needed to demonstrate a sense of belonging in order to achieve in school. This suggests that learners need to behave according to the conventions of school rituals to show that they were engaged and this was likely to produce successful grade achievement. Such may be the case as far as high school dropouts are concerned. But, in this study we are concerned with children in primary schools who, at the end of

their CPE examination, directly enrol in secondary schooling. I wonder whether the literature above condemns children to drop out because they did not show any sense of belonging or fail to achieve or showed less commitment. This suggests that children from perceived “disadvantaged families” are less likely to succeed in a schooling system which (un) consciously affirm certain ethos and values. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that simply because children disengage from the cultural ethos of a school, that they automatically drop out. The simple question is: do children disconnect even if they are engaged?

Further literature studies advance other reasons to explain school disengagement: the “disconnected” children live in disadvantaged areas, in families without resources; they lack school readiness; they are not connected with peers, teachers and school, and they are frequently ill and absent from school (Hancock & Zubrick, 2015). On the other hand, Fredericks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) advocate that children’s low behavioural, emotional and cognitive levels of engagement are the major indicators of disengagement. Murray, Mitchell, Gale, Edwards and Zyngier (2014) in a report to the Contributing to Australian Scholarship and Science (CASS) foundation focusing on the Australian programme argue for a range of non-school factors and school factors which may place at-risk students in a position of disengagement. These factors include, among others, *family factors* such as family size, violence and abuse, family separation, family mobility, and *social factors* such as gender, race and ethnicity and neighbourhood characteristics. They also included a list of individual factors that foreground children’s self-esteem as an important factor influencing school disengagement.

Lounsbury (1996, pp 9-10), who predates the Murray et al. study, cautioned against the use of the framing adopted by such studies. He suggested that these framings of children disengagement promote a “deficit model that blames the victims and stigmatises individual students, and the literature focuses on children at risk of early dropout and leaves no space for other possible important issues like, for example, children who achieve academically and still disengage”. Lounsbury (1996) even states that if children are at risk of failing, it is not because they have not learnt but because the school has not been able to engage them by providing them with experiences that were worth doing. This statement by Lounsbury shifts emphasis away from the child alone and

locates co-responsibility to the failure of engaging children on the school and the school curricular programme.

We are thus confronted with three sets of literature which suggest on one hand that the learner/individual issues may be possible factors for disengagement, on the other hand family, institutional (school) issues and personal issues may be possible factors for children's disengagement and dropout, and on the third hand that disengagement has to do with individual cognitive psychological issues. Thus, it seems to suggest that children's disengagement can be due to systemic choices or due to agentive choices. Is children disengagement structural or agentive? Frohlich and Potvin (2010) argue in a study on epidemiology that the causes of social inequalities in health may be either structural or agentive and they concluded that structural interventions are less likely to cause more inequalities than the agentive interventions. This situation can also be the case in schooling. As literature seems to attribute disengagement to either the children or to the social/institutional aspect, we may ask ourselves whether such disengagement from school that ultimately leads to dropping out is systemic or agentive? Although the reasons for disengagement may be social, institutional, individual and/or psychological, literature does not tell us what causes children to drop out from school?

The CREATE project (2011) attributes dropping out from school to either the economic factor of the cost of schooling, to poor health, migration, parental issues, disability, poor schooling, teacher absenteeism and distance from school, hence to structural interventions (the aim and approach of the CREATE project is explained in 1.4.1). However, some literature proposes a more agentive intervention. Using Mauritius as an example, I do not really know which factors apply to most of our children. It means that dropping out from school have several issues that are unexplored. The theoretical framework will be convenient to explore this myriad of unexplored issues that influence children to drop out. This in turn will benefit to fill in the gaps that the CREATE project (2011) intend to target by 2025. But one argument from the study looks alarming when the author(s) mention that "most of what needs to be known to universalise access is known but is often not applied in practice" (CREATE, 2011, p. 9). This seems to suggest that the praxis may lead to children's dropping out or to disengage. Through the exploration of the life experiences of OOSC in schooling, this study aims to fill in the missing gap of understanding what happens in the life of the children that leads them to

drop-out. The CREATE project mentions that the individual characteristics, the household characteristics, the community, the school practices and the policy should be well balanced so that meaningful equitable access can be reached. But are the interactions within these characteristics that ultimately lead to disengagement? This is the gap that needs to be filled.

Further literature also shows a divergence between children and teachers' views on the factors that lead to disengagement. Hancock and Zubrick (2015) reflect that children suggest they need to be listened to, talked to, made to feel secure and safe and be respected. Children rarely cite their families as being responsible for their engagement but rather comment on the schools and the classrooms as being levers of (dis)engagement. These levers are the pivotal forces that influence their decision. On the other hand, teachers believe that pedagogy, curriculum, streaming, children's responsibilities, the family and expectations are the levers of engagement for children. Children suggest personal relational issues within the school as sources of disengagement, whereas teachers seem to suggest structural and institutional factors as the greater levers. Oliveira (2014) tells us that refusal of children to participate in an activity, participating but not engaged (quiet disengagement) and disruption were all forms of disengagement shown by children in her study. Oliveira's study was conducted with high school children. There seems to be a break between children's expectations and teachers' expectations that may influence children to disconnect. Can this difference in expectations be influential to the process of dropping out? We do not know what happens in the school and classroom during the teaching/learning process and whether there are relational issues. In other words, what is going wrong in the practice? The theoretical framework will take on this issue of school and classroom relation in the development of the instruments. Thus, through this study, we will be able, through the children's voices, to fill the missing gap and emphasis will be put on primary school learners since most literature seems to focus on secondary school dropouts.

While these studies may highlight the leverage points affecting children's disengagement from school, they do not detail sufficiently how the intersected life experiences of children drawing from these multiple contexts culminate in their choice of dropping out. Mastroilli (2002) tells us that little is known on how schooling processes these institutional, classroom and beyond-institutional factors which culminate in school

(dis)engagement. There seems to be a consensus in literature that individual, social, family, school, environment issues are possible levers of disengagement for children that may ultimately lead to dropping out. This is corroborated by a study for the Communities in School organisation in the USA (CIS), in which Hammond, Linton, Smink and Drew (2017) attribute the risks of dropping out to four domains, namely individual, family, school and community. According to them, there is no one single factor that can be held responsible for dropping out; rather, the interactions between different domains may accelerate the risk of dropping out.

Likewise, in Mauritius and in the countries where the CREATE project was involved, we do not know which of these domains and their interaction are attributed to promoting dropping out. This interaction between the different levers of disengagement and the life experiences of the children is of interest in this present research because it may establish dominant processes of dropping out. The current study differs from Mastroilli's (2002) research in that it probes a deep qualitative engagement of these varied levels, as opposed to what he did, that is drawing on largely quantitative data from a longitudinal study, looking mainly into how the in-school processes and engagement influence dropping out.

For the purpose of this study, three groups of domains, namely the family, the school and the individual, as proposed by Hammond et al. (2007) have been chosen. The family and community domains of the Hammond et al. study have been integrated under the overarching domain of the social domain because we feel that there is an interaction between the families and their environment. But what are these interactions between the different domains and how does each domain influence other domains? Do these interactions lead the individual to drop out or do they lead the children to being pushed out? Are there other external forces excluding these domains that influence children? This is what this present study is about, that is, to find out how the different domains interact with each other and how it leads/or not to dropping out from school. The choice of the theoretical framework allows for an exploration of not only the interaction within these domains but also with external macro forces.

SECTION B

2.4 Social factors influencing dropping out from school

As mentioned above, the family and the community have been integrated under the factors that are socially related. Thus, in this section, I am going to explore literature related to social issues.

2.4.1 The family involvement in the academic issues of children

Menheere and Hooge (2001) tell us that when parents are academically involved in the children's studies, the children achieve, are more motivated and it contributes to their wellbeing in school. On the other hand, Henderson and Berla (1994) tell us that the extent to which the child's family can promote a home learning environment, shows the expression of their high expectations to achievement and career, and they become involved in the child's education at school and in the community, thus helping the child to aspire to high performance. These families contribute to the upgrading of the school and their involvement serves as a strategy for school improvement through their involvement in school activities. Thus, such families contribute to the school and community status and are well considered by teachers and administrators. Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems (2003) tell us that parents' involvement is desired by all stakeholders in education, but there is, however, an underutilisation of parents in the schooling system due to lack of comprehensive programmes to integrate parents. Different surveys conducted by Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems (2003) show that half of the teachers in their studies reported that they rarely had contact with the parents and that teachers rarely initiated contact with parents. If ever any contact was made, then it was for either the purpose of discipline or because the parent initiated the contact to have a view about his child's achievement. The report suggests, therefore, that parents whose children were considered average achievers rarely had any contact with the teachers. Teachers also suggested that they preferred not to have increased contact with such parents. The surveys in the study of Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems (2003) were conducted in different places in the USA, mainly in Maryland with 3,700 elementary school teachers across 600 schools and in San Francisco with 307 high school teachers.

The literature studies above argue how important it is for families to get involved in their children's studies for the children, the school and the community all benefit from these involvement. What is the situation in other countries (beyond largely the western world contexts) where there are high rates of OOSC? A study in India by Sreekanth (2011) reveals that the involvement of parents was limited to attending parent/teachers meeting or lower engagement with the homework. However, in three cases among the 35 parents who took part in the case study, the parents showed very high involvement, especially where the expectations were high or where achievement was of utmost priority or the prospects for a better job was concerned. Hence, Sreekanth (2011) tells us that there is high level involvement when the priority is market-driven. In other words his study showed that when the stakes are high to acquire a good job, parents make it a priority to accompany their children by all means (physical and financial). The study concerned children from Grade 4 to Grade 12.

However, we know little of the involvement of families who originate from less affluent homes. This is most probably one of the important factors influencing reasons why children drop out from schools, as the study of ZEP schools in Mauritius reveals (ODEROI, 2008). In Sreekanth's (2011) study, the three parents who showed total involvement showed a lot of investment (time and financial) to get involved in the studies of their children. Involvement with the school for parents who come from lower socioeconomic contexts, like the OOSC, may sometimes mean that they have to interrupt their daily activities to accompany their children either to meet teachers or for administrative purposes. This involvement might not always be practically possible. We know that during the examination periods in Mauritius, especially at the time of the final primary CPE examination, parents take long leave from work to attend to their children's studies. Is such the case for all types of families or are families in less affluent environments unable to engage in, or choose not to be involved with such home-school interaction practices? Is social status a major mediating influence in family involvement in children's studies and teachers' expectations and as such a predisposition towards school dropout? The CREATE research tells us that the household is one important aspect for meaningful and equitable access, at par with other factors (CREATE, 2011) as mentioned in 1.4.1. The possible non-participation of less affluent families in the home-school interaction may bring an imbalance in such an interaction thus leading to exclusion.

My experience as a long-term practitioner led me to believe that it was very gratifying when meeting parents of high achievers because the meetings were very cordial and the parents were equally amicable. But meetings with parents of children of average conduct and academics tended to be more tense and negative or less gratifying for both teacher and parent. Do families of under-achieving children have the same cordial and amicable consideration from their children's teachers? Is social status an influence in teachers' attitudes and thus encourage or discourage parents to get involved in their children's studies? This is a gap that has to be explored by the current study and the theoretical framework chosen seems appropriate.

2.4.1.1 *The barriers that limit parental involvement*

The subsection above seems to suggest that some parents get easily involved while others do not. What prevents them from doing so? According to Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems (2003), the main barrier that may prevent parental involvement is that parents lack the confidence or the desire to get involved. Some parents believe that education is a matter between school and children and that parent ought to have no say in it. However, the study does not mention whether the parents involved were from a middle-class or working-class families. There is, however, another school of thought. Greenwood and Hickman (1991) claim that parents shun meeting teachers because either parents do not value education highly or because they believe that the running of the school should be left to professionals. Others, according to Dwyer and Hecht (2001), feel that their child is doing well at school and that there is no reason to intervene. Others might have encountered negative experiences as children and do not wish to live that experience again (Dwyer & Hecht, 2001; Decker et al., 2000; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Different opinions seem to point to the fact that it is the parents' responsibility to make the move towards teachers whereas in the same study, teachers felt that they **preferred not to have increased contact** (my emphasis) with parents having low academic and behaviour issues.

The situation in the schooling system in Mauritius is not different from that presented in the literature. Because of the importance given to the CPE examination which is a determinant to access a 'good' secondary school or between the main stream and the prevocational (explained in Chapter 1), parents' interaction with the school is of utmost importance. How frequent are the contacts between the school and the parents and for

what purpose? Who makes the contact: is it the parents or the school? How easily can parents attend such meetings? If some parents shun meetings, what are the reasons? It may be that the argument of Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems (2003) does not necessarily hold for all types of families. Is the Mauritian context the same for the countries where CREATE project is implemented and researched and does such a situation affect the practice? The current study may give more insight as to why teachers and parents do not meet often. However, if parents and teachers do not meet, how does that influence the decision of children to drop-out or to disengage?

One school of thought seems to set the responsibilities for not meeting parents on the teachers' shoulders. Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems (2003) put forward the fact that some teachers do not value parental involvement. Many reasons are given for this. Dodd and Konzal (2000) argue that parents can be too cumbersome and it is better to keep them at a distance. Lazar and Slostad (1999) see it as a matter of loss of authority by the teacher when parents tend to query and get more involved in classroom management, and the curriculum. Baker (2000) provides two perspectives about this issue by saying that teachers perceive parents as being disrespectful or challenging their authority.

On the other hand, parents' perception is that they were not welcome and were made to feel like intruders for interfering. We can see that even though involvement between school, teachers and parents is a *sine-qua-non* for children's involvement, there are times when the eagerness for such involvement is not forthcoming for one reason or another. These literature studied seem to point to the fact that even though the general belief is that teachers and parents should meet often for the benefit of children, there is a reluctance from both parties concerned to meet.

If this situation is also similar to Mauritius, why is it the case? Despite the reasons given above, there may be a power-related issue that prevail in the Mauritian schooling context which may activate unique dynamics between schools and homes. And if it is not, what could explain the feelings of stigmatisation and discrimination that some parents and some learners may experience? The tools that will explore such a relationship between parents (affluent and non-affluent), teachers, schools and so on, will be drawn from the chosen theoretical framework established at the end of this

chapter. The current study will explore, from the children's point of view, such power-relations and influences on the practice.

2.4.1.2 *Family structures as an influence for dropping out of school*

It is believed that the type of family structure can influence student attainment and engagement. Thus, it is important when addressing children's involvement to have an idea of the family structure and its importance in educational attainment and school engagement. Amato (1987), Yin Kuan and Yang (2000), Hampden-Thompson and Galindo (2015) claim that the nature of the family that a child lives in influences his life pattern as well as his educational achievement. Several researchers label family structures differently. Oyerinde (2001) states the types of family structures as single-parent families, two-parent families and stepparent families. Fonteboa (2012) goes by the concept of traditional and non-traditional families. She defined non-traditional families as "any family that is not comprised in its entirety by two biological parents (or adoptive parents by birth)" (Fonteboa, 2012, p. 16). On the other hand, traditional families were defined as "any family comprised in its entirety by two biological parents (or adoptive parents from birth)"(ibid.). She found out, in a quantitative study, that there was a significant gap in grade achievement between both types of families. However, there seems to be many critics as she explains, which, according to her demonstrate that additional research is required in the field.

Oyerinde (2001) also tells us that either in a single-parent or in a two-parent family, parents are engaged in the children's training. Astone and McLanahan (1994) talk of intact (living with both parents) and non-intact families (living with a single parent or with step-parents). Children living in intact families are more likely to pursue their studies to higher levels as compared to those from non-intact families and they suggest that this difference is due to family mobility. It happens that children and families need to move to other regions because of bereavement, breaking-up families, and this may affect children's schooling as well as adapting to a new environment. This suggests that family structures are influenced by other factors that in turn influence achievement.

But, neither Oyerinde (2001), Fonteboa (2012), nor Astone and McLanahan (1994) tell us how the composition of the family structures influence engagement, hence dropping out. They all seem to lead to different factors. What is common is that in some family

structures children seem to be having higher grades while in others, there is a low achievement when families live in instability. But that does not mean that whatever type of family structure the child lives in, deterministically influences dropping out. Nevertheless, in their study from England, Hampden-Thompson and Galindo (2015, p. 13) tell us that “there is evidence that young children who have experienced a change in family structure are potentially at risk of dropping out from school, and that is irrespective of the nature of the change”.

The Mauritian context offers several types of family structures where our children come from and may have even experienced a change in family structure. This varies from single-parent, to stepparents, where according to Amato (1987), either one or the other parent remarries, and there is the presence of either a step-father or stepmother. A re-partnered family is another type of family structure, quite common among deprived children, and can be considered as a ‘stepparent’ structure. The particularity of this structure is that it can have a situation of biological mother and social father, or a biological father and social mother. Nevertheless, in most situations, it is the mother who chooses to re-partner but it is the father who is considered as the breadwinner and, thus, this impacts on the whole family.

If we follow the logic of Fonteboa (2012) and Oyerinde (2001), these children are therefore bound to reach lower achievement level. However, Oyerinde (2001, p. 3) gives us an image of a country where culturally the father tends to be the unquestionable authority, and this may also be the case in Mauritius and many countries where the CREATE project is being carried on. What about the influence of extended families on children’s engagement? Who heads the family? Usually, according to Oyerinde (2001), the father, as breadwinner is the head of family and the mother (or woman) is the carer of children.

The issue of family structure is very complex, especially where CREATE has conducted its studies, as we do not know from what type of family the OOSC come and how long the child remains in the same structure. Are the children living in intact, non-intact families, single parent, with biological parents or re-partnered parents? Furthermore, how far does family structure influence what is not put in practice, as suggested by the CREATE (2011) project? The theoretical framework will explore what these family structures are and how they influence the process of dropping out. The sampling will

take into consideration the possibility of reaching several family structures, so that we may know what is the influence of the different types of family structures, over time, on the children's dropping out from school. This is a gap that needs to be filled by the current study.

2.4.1.3 School-parent-family-community interactive forces influencing dropping out of school

However, the family does not operate in a vacuum when children's education is at stake. In a National Education Association (NEA) Policy (2008) which advocates for education professionals in the USA, emphasis is put on the claim that it takes a whole community to play an essential role in the growth and development of a child and that education by itself will not be able to lift up all the poor students. According to them, poor children are already disadvantaged and are significantly left behind their peers (NEA, 2008) and when the children's learning is supported by the school, the parents, the families and the community, the children have a higher chance of achieving and obtaining higher grades. Supporters of teaching professionals in the US profess this ideal relationship for low-achieving children. They believe that if such relationships exist, then children will be more regular in school, will stay in school longer and will even enrol in higher grades level programmes (NEA, 2008, p. 1). We do not know however, to what extent is this ideal achieved in practice.

On the other hand, Hancock and Zubrick (2005) advocate that it is up to the education system, the school and the teachers to implement strategies for preventing disengagement to take place. They do, however, mention some difficulties that the school and education system may encounter, for example, significant resource (human and financial) is needed. The second difficulty is that some families may not be able to have enough resources (in terms of time or money), to engage their children. The third difficulty is that teachers view parents as being the primary members who are responsible for disengagement whereas parents may feel that teachers and the school are responsible for children's disengagement. There is what is called "a struggle to position responsibility for children's disengagement" (Hancock & Zubrick, 2005, p. 9).

In Mauritius, some schools that have the same profile as the schools mentioned by Hancock and Zubrick (2005) are the ZEP schools (mentioned in Chapter 1). Similarly too,

the declared policy of the ZEP project also suggested as the literature above, that ZEP schools should rest on five main pillars, which are:

- “More equitable reallocation of human resources to schools;
- Improvement of infrastructure and school environment;
- Formulation and implementation of a School Development Plan;
- ***Strengthening community links***; (my emphasis)
- Developing an improved management structure for the project”

(UNESCO, 2015, p. 17).

The literature studies above seem to suggest that on one hand, when there is no interactive relationship between the parents, school and community, children underachieve. On the other hand, there are difficulties that arise which may prevent such strategies that can be employed by the education system to prevent disengagement. This seems to be confirmed by the Table 2.1 where, a study by the Indian Ocean Child’s Right Observatory (ODEROI, 2008) on ZEP schools, shows that the involvement of the different partners (especially parents and community) was poor.

Table 2.1: Role of other support

	Excellent	Satisfactory	Poor
School Deputy Head teacher’s involvement in performing his duties	52.0	48.0	
Teacher’s involvement in performing their duties	50.0	50.9	
Role of cluster coordinator	37.0	55.6	7.4
Liaison officer	34.8	60.9	4.3
Company delegates	33.3	58.3	8.3
Private sector’s contribution	26.9	65.4	7.7
Role of School Development Unit (SDU)	25.9	66.7	7.4
Parent mediator	19.2	69.2	11.5
School facilities	14.3	85.7	–

	Excellent	Satisfactory	Poor
Government aid	14.3	75.0	10.7
Role of the PTA	10.7	78.6	10.7
Pupil's interest in studies	–	48.1	51.9
Pupil's interest in attending school	–	60.7	39.3
Parent's interest in their child's studies	–	35.7	64.3
Parent's interest in school activities	–	59.3	40.7
Role of local community	–	48.1	51.9

Source: ODEROI (2008)

However, the studies seem to be contradictory as for the NEA (2008) all the components, that is, the family, parents, school and community should be involved so that children remain engaged in schools; whereas in Australia, it seems that it is the responsibility of the education system to keep children engaged even though they (the system) lack the resources to shoulder such responsibilities. Who shoulders such responsibilities where the CREATE project is implemented? The CREATE research tells us of the balanced interaction between the different components for meaningful and equitable access. In Mauritius, such a deliberate strategy to cohere multiple stakeholders has been the expressed intention of the policy intervention in the ZEP schools by the education system. However, it appears that such has not yet yielded positive results (ODEROI, 2008). How does this situation influence the OOSC to drop out? If the education system lacks the means to shoulder the responsibility of getting a strong relationship between the family, the parent, the school and the community, then what is happening to the children in disadvantaged areas? We know little from formal systemic research about what are the quality of interactions between the parents, family, school and community, especially in the regions, 'the pockets of poverty', where low-achieving schools are located. The choice of the theoretical framework will allow an exploration of such interactions and especially how it influences the enactment of policy intentions into practice. This is why the current study is being conducted as it may shed more light on the importance of the relationship played by the school, parents, family and community in the disengagement and ultimate dropout of the children from school.

2.4.2 Peer influences on school dropouts

Another important aspect within the community that may influence children's engagement is the role of peer groups in the life of the OOSC. Children tend to accommodate friends either within their home environment or within the school environment. In some cases, the peers can be friends from both home and school. However, little is known about the influence of the peers in the process of engagement/disengagement, especially within the age group of this study. What are the interactions that come in action between the children and their peers when they are within the same age group of 5 to 16 years? Veiga, Wentzel, Melo, Pereira, Faria and Galvão (2014, p. 197) tell us "that peer groups do impact on students' attitudes and behaviours" and that once the group is created, the members have the tendency to share the same characteristics. The study used a "method that entailed systematic searching, reviewing, and writing to bring together key themes and findings of research in this field" (Veiga et al., 2014, p. 198) to search for articles and documents to reach a conclusion. They concluded that when schools and peers were positive, it was associated with an increase in academic motivation, self-esteem and academic performance but when those factors were negative, it impacted negatively on engagement and caused disaffection.

Meanwhile, further literature on peers' support to OOSC shows the different types of influence that can take place within groups. Herald-Brown, Kochel and Ladd (2008) state that peer relationships are perhaps most influential in shaping the children's attitudes towards schooling. They pinpoint three types of influence, namely, "peer group rejection, friendship and peer victimisation" (Herald-Brown, Kochel and Ladd, 2008, p. 9) as being responsible for school engagement/ disengagement. This tends to show that the relationship within the groups can take different forms, one where the child is rejected by the group, another where they are accepted and in the third case where children are victimised by their own peers. In each case, the personality of the affected children is reinforced by what type of friendship they indulge in.

It may be possible that children go through peer rejection, which according to Ladd (2005), is responsible for a series of school problems such as disengagement. If the children are rejected, they are not included in the peer group and thus may not be able to engage in school activities. But, what about those children who reject their peers

because of some problems that may have taken place within the group? Those who project themselves as leaders of a group and who decide on whom to accept and whom to reject must be having a higher influence on the group. They may therefore be enjoying a higher self-esteem. What are their roles in the schooling agenda of the group?

Sometimes, peering takes a more positive direction in friendship, the mutual acceptance of a pair or more children. This has more of a social and academic impact where children tend to support each other, thus providing more “emotional security and physical aid” (Herald-Brown et al., 2008, p. 10). Because of the age group where friendship begins in the life of the OOSC, we do not know what type of bond exists between them and how it evolves with time.

At other times, peering can take the form of peer victimisation which is more of an exposure of children to abuse by their peers. Such abuse could be physical or verbal (Olweus, 2001). It is argued that peer victimisation is responsible directly or indirectly for school disengagement through either physical absence from school or through distress caused by such acts. In another study by Carter and Nutbrown (2016), they mention that friendship takes different meanings at different stages of child development and peer acceptance depends largely on the children’s own needs as they grow up.

However, Herald-Brown, Kochel and Ladd (2008, p. 9) tells us that more powerful than peer influence, is the quality of the parent-child relationship which may also be a key factor that influences children’s disengagement. They suggest that that “an overly close and dependent parent-child relationship appear to place children at risk for peer victimisation and rejection”. They suggest that children who depend too much on the parents, tend to lose their autonomy. This may affect the children and interfere in their search for a relationship with peers.

Another school of thought suggests that children having a strong relationship and emotional bond with their parents remain engaged in schooling (Connell, Spencer & Aber, 1994). Additionally, Rosenthal (1998) tells us that children from a single parent have a tendency to disengage from school.

Just as in Mauritius, OOSC, like other children feel the need to “like or be liked”, and “to like to spend time together with other children” (Carter & Nutbrown, 2016). These studies reinforce the notion that friendship is an important influence, and can impact children’s decision-making strategies and actions. This literature supports the view that peers can help or not in motivating each other, thus increasing self-esteem that in turn enhances or not academic performance. These studies confirm that supportive peering is viewed by learners as being positive to their well-being. When academic motivation is not present, it lowers self-esteem that in turn impacts negatively on achievement. This could be considered as negative peering. What type of peering do our OOSC have? And does it really enhance or impact negatively on their achievement to the point of dropping out? And what about parent-child relationship?

What were the needs of the OOSC in terms of friendship? What type of friendship were they experiencing at home and in school? Were they being rejected, accepted or victimised? Were they enjoying positive or negative peering? What were their needs: did they need support or were they the support of others? How far have they been influenced by their peers into dropping out from school? This could be a missing gap that the current study aims to explore. The theoretical framework will assist in the exploration of peer group influences in its design of the research instruments.

2.4.3 Neighbourhood influences on dropping out from school

In 2.4.1.3 we discussed the importance of the community in the relationship between the school, the parents and the family. Can the neighbourhood the child lives in influence dropping out from school? In trying to find the influence of neighbourhood on outcomes, Gibbons (2002) found out that children living in the same neighbourhood had the same level of attainment. This is due, in his view, to the fact that parents in the same neighbourhood are similar to each other and have similar facilities. His interpretation of the coefficients showed that if children were brought up in an environment where there was more keenness to achieve, their contact time with education would increase. This environment to which Gibbons (2002) is referring can have a double meaning in the sense that children who were brought up in an environment where there was no keenness to achieve it would decrease their contact time to education and thus lessen their attainment.

His second finding showed that despite the fact that residential neighbourhood has an impact over and above anything related to school performance, it is the parents who are affected. Because parents live in segregated neighbourhood, very often it is the children who are affected. Children of families living in segregated neighbourhoods seems therefore to be at a disadvantage because their parents have a low socioeconomic background.

Even though Garner and Raudenbush (1991, p. 258) tell us that “neighbourhood deprivation has a significant and negative association with attainment”, this seems to be in contradiction with the research of Gibbons (2002). Garner and Raudenbush tell us that children whose fathers are in higher social class have a better educational outcome than children coming from large families, from single-parent families or where fathers are currently unemployed. According to them, attainment is not only determined by individual and family background and schooling effects, but that the effect of neighbourhoods must also be taken into consideration in reaching attainment. But this was further contradicted by Gibbons, Silva and Weinhardt (2013, p. 22) research in English schools, as they tell us that “the characteristics of neighbourhood peers make no difference at all to how well children perform in school”. Even though there seems to be an impact on their inclination for anti-social behaviour, the effects are negligible. Thus it seems that neighbourhood segregation is an outcome and not the cause, of inequalities and wealth” Gibbons, Silva and Weinhardt (2013, p. 22). According to them, it is the individual characteristics and the categorisation of people over time that explain such inequalities. By changing the resources, for example the school attended by the children, in the long term the families will benefit. Most probably the context in which the studies have been researched are not the same. There are situations where different types of families live in a context where the more affluent are dominant, for example within an IRS complex. Children of less able families will not be in a situation to attend the same fee-paying schools or shop in the same hyper-markets of the IRS. This neighbourhood context is worth researching in order to see its effects on OOSC, especially when admission to primary and secondary school is done on a residential/regional basis..

In Mauritius, admission to pre-primary, primary and secondary school is done on a regional basis, hence children in the same region attend the same school. The CREATE

(2011) project tells us that in India, children have to travel long distances to attend school. This could be the same in the countries where there is a high dropout rate. Schools may be situated in urban, rural and suburban regions and the social composition of each area is not the same. Although statistics do not give an idea of the social composition of the residential areas, we know that in neighbourhoods where there is a low performing school, affluent families prefer to send their children to a fee-paying primary school (see Chapter 1). It is difficult to know what motivates parents to such a practice. We see, through the reforms (1.3.2) the importance attached to schooling and how sometimes even the cultural/religious issues can disrupt the application of a reform. One possible explanation, in Mauritius, is that there may be no star secondary school attached to the region, as admission to secondary school is also done on residential areas after the CPE examinations. This is why the regional zones explained in 1.3.2 comprise an urban and several rural regions (see 1.3.2).

Can this mean that OOSC, in Mauritius, who live in regions where the percentage pass at the CPE is less than 40% disengage because the neighbourhood's outcome is low? What about regions where there are families of different social status? Is the neighbourhood income high? Is that the reason why affluent families send their children to fee-paying schools? It may be possible that the neighbourhood has a huge influence on children's disengagement and to dropping out from school. But what is the influence between school, children, parents and neighbourhood? The current study will explore the effects from the neighbourhood. Given that schooling is done on a regional basis, how far does the neighbourhood influence dropping out? Through the choice of the theoretical framework that is presented at the end of this chapter, an exploration of the different components will allow one of the gaps to be filled.

2.4.4 Employment status and its influence on dropping out

Much of the literature that we have encountered has in some way or another made reference to low socioeconomic status families and their relation to children's achievement or engagement or attainment (Gibbons, 2002; Garner & Raudenbush, 1991; Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003). What we know from literature is that families living in deprived areas or living in poverty, according to Katz, Corlyon, La Placa and Hunter (2007), face issues such as lack of material resources, low levels of education and few qualifications, lack of access to jobs and services, isolation, mental and physical ill

health and domestic violence, all factors which may influence a child's educational outcome.

Palmer, MacInnes and Kenway (2006) tell us that children living in single-parent households are at particular risk of experiencing poverty. According to Ridge (2007, p. 400), "the impact of child poverty and parental employment is felt not just in future adulthood, but crucially in childhood itself". Her study is based on the child's perspectives of parent's unemployment and how the children experience and interpret the parent's employment status and its impact upon their everyday life. The choice of this literature is purposeful as Ridge's study concerns lone parents and where the children, in the absence of one of the members of the family, perceive themselves as citizen-workers of the future and not as citizen-children of the present. Children who feel that the presence of one person in the family is not enough for the subsistence of the family may project themselves as the possible breadwinner, thus considering themselves as citizen-workers, whereas children who are not in such need project themselves and behave like children and not workers.

Levine (2009) tells us that parent unemployment may be double-sided where the child may either gain from this situation or else it may be quite stressful in the household such that it can jeopardise the child's development. The positive factor is that the parents have more time to devote to their children, especially in matters related to educational activities, such as helping with homework, or with reading. One of Levine's conclusions is that for households where the mother and spouse/partner are not in unemployment, the children score higher grades in examinations. Test scores decrease as the unemployment spell increases. The literature of Levine (2009) may be applicable to families who earn a high salary and where one of the members of the family can look after the children. Such may not be the case for working-class families where both members of the family may need to seek employment and often they are helped by their children's financial activity too.

Thus, literature gives different directions as to how the employment status influence the decisions of the family but it does not tell us how the interactions between employment, poverty and schooling lead to dropping out from school. The missing gap is that we do not know more in depth in what circumstances our OOSC are living and whether such a situation influences the practice. Are they living with parents in

employment and are they living in different family structures where employment of the adults present may impede their engagement towards the school thus accelerating the decision to drop out from school? OOSC in the CREATE project may be living in different situations, sometimes without the presence of family members because of the distance that between the home and the school resources. These children may be devoid of a family structure and thus depend on the community or the school community to engage in schooling. Are they prone to dropping out because of such circumstances? Literature seems to tell us that there is a direct link between poverty and school disengagement, no one knows holistically what interactions in the employment status of the family trigger the process of dropping out from school. This is where the chosen theoretical framework will help to explore various avenues and various situations in which OOSC are living in. The purpose of this current study is to explore how the employment status of the OOSC's families influence dropping out from school.

SECTION C

2.5 Institutional factors influencing dropping out from school

The social conditions are not the only factors that influence dropping out. Another factor that influences children to engage/disengage is what Murray et al. (2004) call the institutional factors. Below is a review of the literature concerning the factors which Murray et al. (2004) have judiciously separated into school factors and classroom factors.

2.5.1 School factors influencing dropping out from school

We have seen in section 2.4.1.3 that there may be a relationship between the school, the family and the community in the engagement process of children. The interaction within this relationship is important for us to understand the relationship between the life experiences of OOSC in Mauritius and dropping out. In a report to the CASS foundation, Murray et al. (2014) talk about non-school and school factors which place students at risk of disengagement. The school factors that they mention concern the school and the classroom situations. Hence, we are confronted with the school as a possible lever of disengagement and the classroom as another. They claim that school factors such as school leadership, school size, student-staff ratio, grade retention,

discipline, gender issues, social climate, staff professional development, workload, relationships, socioeconomic background can all be factors that determine engagement/disengagement. However, they do not mention how these factors could influence disengagement and dropping out.

On the other hand, Rumberger (2001), in a quantitative analysis, lists several school factors that are possible indicators for children dropping out, which he terms children's disengagement. He suggests that "the social composition of a school can influence students' achievement" (p. 14) and that such results do not take into consideration the students characteristics at an individual level. Bryk and Thum (1989); McNeal (1997b);), Rumberger and Thomas (2000) also confirm such suggestions through several other studies. There are other school factors listed by Rumberger (2001) that may influence children's dropping out from school. School resources could be one such indicator leading to dropping out. He also believes that the quality of teachers, the perception of students and/or principals on the teachers' quality may influence students' performances.

Wehlage, Rutter and Tumbaugh (1987) suggest that small schools are more likely to promote engagement from both the students and the staff. We do not see in the Mauritian context whether such a statement is right as no such detailed statistics exist. Although The Statistics office (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2017) gives detailed results of each school, it does not provide the relationships among the school, teachers and children and relationships with school structures.

Rumberger (2001) also mentions that school structure, the location and the type of school (private, state or confessional (religious)), or the school size may all be indicators for children to drop out. But he does not tell us how these school factors lead to disengagement and even if they do so, whether they lead children to drop out. In some countries, including Mauritius, such indicators may promote engagement, especially if they are high-demand schools. But there are so many other factors that can influence such engagement such as social status, family employment and the community involvement. Thus it cannot be said that school size or the types of schools are responsible for children's dropping out.

However, more recent literature tends to make no distinction between school and classroom issues. Simic and Krstic (2017) tell us that several factors which are school related are responsible for school dropouts. “Low quality (individualisation) of teaching, lack of learning and emotional support, lack of positive teacher-student relationship” (Simic & Krstic, 2017, p. 1) were the greater influences of school dropouts. The qualitative research was conducted in Serbia in eight primary and 13 secondary schools.

Buop, Aloka and Nyaswa (2018) also do not make a distinction between school and classroom factors because they regard teachers as part of the schooling structures. They argue that teachers’ uncaring behaviour caused children to drop out. This study concerns children in Kenya and the study also mentioned that the nature of the curriculum and leadership styles that are harsh and rude are also factors influencing children dropping out. This study suggests a fluid interaction between school structural and personnel staffing influences which coalesce in the classroom practices enacted.

Following literature provided by Wehlage, Rutter & Tumbaugh (1987); Rumberger (2001); Murray et al. (2014), Simic and Krstic (2017); Buop, Aloka and Nyaswa (2018), it seems that there is a consensus that school factors do not exist as an independent category which may influence disengagement. What is common across all these varied studies over time, is that they do not tackle in depth how these systemic, personal adult and children experiences within the broader school and more restricted classroom environments co-affect each other in activating the phenomenon of dropping out.

We know that in Mauritius there are schools which are denoted as “high demand” schools (Ministry of Education, 2018) and we also know that ZEP schools found in deprived areas “were introduced to combat social inequalities for some 6% of the population and ensures the provision of equal opportunities for learning for all children” (UNESCO 2015, p. 17). Thus, at the two extremities of primary schooling, there are schools labelled because of their high performance at the CPE examination and at the other end there are schools labelled as ZEP because of their low performance over three consecutive years at the CPE examination (UNESCO, 2015). ZEP schools do not exist only in Mauritius but also in France and UK (Bénabou, Kramarz & Prost, 2005). Countries where there are high levels of OOSC may also experience such school typologies. How are these schools run and how far do the size, disciplinary policy, retention policy and so on influence children to drop out? These may be the systemic issues into which we need

further information to understand the phenomenon of OOSC. The theoretical framework will develop necessary instruments to explore the interactions between children, schools and family. The theoretical framework will also explore the relationship between school, school practices, school policy and its interaction with OOSC to find out how children are influenced into dropping out from school. Through this current study, we will try to understand the relationship between the different elements of the microsystems and to explore what exactly is impeding the practice.

2.5.1.1 Relationship between schools and socioeconomic background and its influence on dropping out

Socioeconomic background has always been presented as a key determinant of success or failure in the future. Socioeconomic status is “not only related to income but concerns also educational attainment, financial security and subjective perception of social status and social class” (American Psychological Association, 2018, p.1). A report by the UK Institute of Education (2014) claims that school type does not affect children’s attainment capabilities and that wherever there are differences in performance; these differences are attributed to the socioeconomic background of the children. The relationship between the school and socioeconomic background is that where there is a high level of children from the advantaged background, the school performance is much better than schools where there is a high concentration of children from a poor background.

Schools are categorised as low performing when they consistently give below-par results from standard tests, with sometimes low graduation and high dropout rates (Seder, 2000). It may be that the ZEP schools in Mauritius, France and UK are considered as low-performing schools. These low performing schools mentioned by Seder, 2000, are usually located in disadvantaged areas and their resources are limited and the facilities are insufficient, according to the US Department of Education (1998). Such schools show a picture of institutions where it is difficult to recruit qualified teachers, are often overcrowded and suffer from lack of discipline. As a consequence these schools suffer from a low morale, students’ and teachers’ expectations are low and they do not have an organised learning environment. Based on this literature, it seems that there is a cause and effect between socioeconomic background and the schools. Is it the case also in Mauritius, France and UK and other countries in the CREATE project where there may

be low-achieving schools? This study does not aim at finding a cause-effect relationship but is based on the interactions that exist between the different components in the life of the child that ultimately lead to dropping out. What are their interactions? How do children whose families have a low SES view schooling from their perspectives? What picture is revealed between the school and OOSC coming from a low socioeconomic background? It seems according to literature that low SES children are doomed to drop out because of their social status. I rather believe that policy, society and the school see low SES children as being doomed to fail and for that reason they are channelled to vocational streams. My study will aim at answering these questions.

2.5.1.2 *Perspectives of children attending a chronically low performing school*

Since there is a high probability that OOSC children were living in deprived regions they must have been aware that they were attending a low performing school. What are the perspectives and expectations of such children? Horgan (2007) informs us that children's experiences of schooling differ from those from an advantaged area as compared to those from a disadvantaged area. In relation to age, young children see schooling as fun and a place to socialise. As they grow older, those from the advantaged areas see schools as a place to acquire knowledge for access for further education while those from a disadvantaged area see schooling as a way to avoid problems in life later. Children from disadvantaged areas know that schooling is not really fulfilling their expectations and they therefore need to acquire skills, other than academic knowledge, to face life in the future. This is what I call life skills. Horgan's study was conducted by interviewing two hundred and 20 children from advantaged and disadvantaged areas in Northern Ireland. The children were aged between four and 11 years. Teachers and parents were also interviewed in the process. Unfortunately, the study does not tell us whether the children who came from disadvantaged areas, even though they viewed schooling as a way to avoid problems, had a tendency to disengage from school. Furthermore, it does not tell us what they disliked in schooling for them to want to avoid problems. If the children were attending school, it shows that they were engaged, although they may expect different outcomes. The outcomes may be different because of society's expectations and not necessarily because it was their choice.

A quantitative study by Parsons (2015) tells us that there is no drop in performance from high achieving children who move to a low-achieving school in a specific subject, Algebra 1. This study seems to suggest that mobility does not affect children's performances and achievement.

Allensworth, Moore, Sartain and De La Torre (2016, p. 175) tell us that “existing research is insufficient to tell us whether, how and under what circumstances students benefit from attending schools where their peers demonstrate high levels of achievement”. Statistics, according to them, do not show whether, the children who attend these schools had initial qualities. They argue that it is the children's choice to attend such schools and it is not certain that other children who attend the same school will perform. Although parents fight to get their children admitted to a high performing school, the result of their quantitative study shows “mixed but positive consequences for attending a higher achieving school” (Allensworth, Moore, Sartain & De la Torre, 2017, p. 193). Children feel that they have a competitive edge if they attend a high-performing school. Does that mean that children attending a low-performing school have a lesser competitive edge. They argue, however, that achievement depends mostly on the child's own quality.

What about our OOSC coming from disadvantaged areas and attending low performing schools? Do they feel that they have a lesser competitive edge or is it that they lack the quality to achieve? It may be possible that children are influenced by the amount of disadvantages that they encounter. In the summary of Horgan's study he indicates that the way the children experience schooling depends on the level of disadvantage that they face. Those who are less disadvantaged are much prepared for schooling while some children who are poorer, according to him, become aware of their social positions at a very young age and this position will be reflected in their school experience. Therefore, they believe that they are not going to do better than the advantaged children. Is it the reason why they lack the qualities of a high achiever?

What about the children's and teachers' expectations? Is there a difference between their own and their teachers' expectations? According to Horgan (2007), that may be the case. It gives the impression that schooling is a process where better off children are bound to have a high achievement as compared to poor students. Is this what is happening to our OOSC? If they believe that such is the case, then does it motivate or

demotivate them? Horgan (2007) also tells us that it was only children who were disenchanted who started to disengage by the age of nine, and this age corresponds, by Mauritian norms, to Standard 5 (Grade 5 see 1.3.2). Are our poor children in Standard 5, in Mauritius, disenchanted and therefore prone to disengage? Do they show such signs as from Standard 5 or is it well before that time? But if we follow Allensworth, Moore, Sartain and De la Torre (2017) argument, the children may lack the quality to achieve. The current study will have to explore this issue through the chosen theoretical framework and it seems that there is a gap regarding whether attending a low performing school is not beneficial to children or that the children lack the qualities of a high achiever. We do not know that if this is the case, this may lead to dropping out from school. The term disenchanted means that they were deceived by someone whom they previously admired and accepted. It may be that OOSC were disenchanted, and if such is the case, by whom were they disenchanted and what were the causes? How has disenchantment influenced their schooling? Was it because they were shouted at by those that were supposed to provide them a good quality teaching as suggested by Sutton, Smith, Dearden and Middleton (2007)? What was the dream promised, and do OOSC experience a sense of being disenchanted? They posited that children from disadvantaged areas complained about being shouted at, the poor quality of teaching, the long hours of schooling and the lack of time to eat or play. What is the source of disenchantment of children? How does the school, the teachers, the school programme or the school expectations influence or not their disenchantment?

The literature suggests that children from disadvantaged areas believe that they are already also disadvantaged in schools, and it may be possible that these perspectives may have led them to drop out from school. Another argument suggests that the children lack the qualities to achieve. What are the perspectives of our OOSC within the Mauritian schooling context? If they were attending a low-performing school, did they also feel that they were disadvantaged in school? Were they shouted at? What are the experiences which make up any disenchantment if it exists? This point of view of our OOSC is unheard in the international context and this current study aims to explore such issues.

2.5.2 Classroom factors influencing dropping out from school

Although at times it is difficult to dissociate school factors from classroom factors, for the purpose of the literature, Murray et al. (2004) purposely made the dissociation which supports that classroom factors may lead to engagement. However, such was not the case of Buop, Aloba and Nyaswa (2018) who included classroom factors as being school factors. The studies seem to emphasise that children seem to pinpoint the quality of teaching and the teachers' attitudes towards them as pivotal to their experiences of schooling. Even though we have the tendency to point to teachers when it comes to classroom matters, we should not forget that teachers are transmitters of knowledge of policy decisions that are not their undertaking. Hence, they are only one pawn in classroom matters. Teachers have other roles as expected by policy, such as teacher as a carer, teacher as a role model, teacher as a tone-setter in the classroom, teacher as a mentor. Moreover, teachers are expected to ensure a warm atmosphere in the classroom, listen to children and prevent classroom problems (Ministry of Education, Guyana, 2014). Thus, teachers have a huge impact on children's engagement/disengagement process. Are teachers conscious of the different roles they play in a classroom or are they too involved in what parents' expectations want them to be, that is a transmitter of knowledge. Hancock and Zubrick (2015, p. 7) tell us that this importance of teachers can be seen through how "firmly their role is linked with the pedagogy, the curriculum, streaming and setting the context for expectations and responsibilities". It seems that due to these explicit roles, teachers are less conscious of the other roles which may be as important as those argued by Hancock and Zubrick. As a result they are less likely to believe that the building of a strong relationship with the children as being important for keeping children engaged. Buop, Aloba and Nyaswa (2018, p. 6) are adamant that teachers' harsh and negative comments on one hand, and "that very high expectation of the teacher from the pupils is enough to make slow pupils to drop out from school". Simic and Kristic (2017, p. 56) also venture along the same lines. They argue that "the quality of teaching in schools with a high dropout rate is not adequate for knowledge acquisition in all students and dropout prevention". Teachers do not use innovative means as support for children's learning, but instead lowered the learning criteria. This was also a remark made by the ODEROI (2008) project for ZEP schools. Paley (1986) and Boynton and Boynton (2005) believed that as the teacher is the one who holds a great deal of power, he or she must understand that children also need

care and to be valued by people that are significant to them. When such is not the case, children become disenchanted. Horgan (2007) also tells us that children seem to be disenchanted, and most probably by their state of poverty or by teachers' disposition towards them.

Even though Paley's study dates back to 1986 and was about early childhood education, she found how it was important to build a strong relationship with the children so that through their (the children's) stories they could reveal all their curiosity. Thus, a different approach to teaching where the person in power can develop a high expectation of children, especially at a very young age, may help in keeping children engaged. How far is this type of pedagogy being applied in the classrooms where OOSC are, especially those who are more in need of care? We know that children start schooling at the very young age of four, sometimes at three but we do not know what the degree of the kind of relationship exists between teachers and children. The transition from pre-primary to primary schooling may also be a factor of disenchantment for children in Mauritius as often there is a continued change of school and teachers. Teachers in the public state schools are subject to transfers on a regular basis. The teachers in pre-primary school is not the one that teaches in primary schooling. Is it the same in other countries? What are the effects of such a transition on our children and how much disenchantment does it bring to them?

Boynton and Boynton (2005) advocate that helping children to reconstruct their lives by storytelling, as Paley (1986) did, could be used as a strategy to keep children involved in their schooling. CREATE (2011) project tells us that there is silent exclusion in countries that are poor and where there are health problems. Could silent exclusion be also impacted by teaching strategies? What was done in the early ages of schooling of our OOSC? Was there a focus on relationship-building with their classroom teacher or was it more a focus on curriculum-completion? Are our teachers curriculum-minded because of the importance given to the CPE examination and all the selection criteria attached to it (see 1.3.2)? In exploring the children's experiences through the theoretical framework, the useful and appropriate tools will be developed in order to explore such issues and we will be able to try and fill these gaps in understanding how teaching strategies can help children to engage or disengage.

2.5.2.1 *Influences of the curriculum and policy on dropping out*

Buop, Aloka and Nyaswa (2018) mention that the nature of the curriculum is a factor that can demotivate children up to the point of dropping out. They also mentioned the complex curriculum and a congested syllabus as possible influencers for children to drop out. For Rumberger (2001), there is no doubt that there is a relationship between school policies and practice and children's engagement. He mentions that school policies and practice have a high incidence on children's disengagement and dropping out. He gives two ways in which schools favour students' withdrawal. One such possibility is through the different policies applied for school effectiveness but which indirectly bring about voluntary withdrawal of children from the education system through disengagement. The other is "through explicit policies and conscious decisions that cause students to involuntarily withdraw from school" (Rumberger, 2001, p. 16). This form of involuntary departure from school may be the most important form of exclusion that discharges children from school rather than gets them to drop out (Riehl, 1999). Howarth (2006, p. 1) tells us that children feel "marginalised, different, discriminated against" well before the occurrence of exclusion or feeling excluded happens. Although her study concerns black children, there is a feeling that children are made unwanted thus leading to symbolic exclusion. Are our OOSC made to feel unwanted, discriminated against, marginalised in school and are the curriculum and policy influencers for such exclusion? On what basis are they excluded? The current study will try to understand what the children have experienced during their schooling period which has led them to dropping out from school. Have they felt disenchanted, has the curriculum and policy pushed them out? The reforms in 1.3.2 shows a shift from universal access to education to an economy of education where the policy tries to minimise the cost and maximise manpower.

On the other hand Lapacinski (1991, p. 111) states that the curriculum is designed in such a way that it already prepares children to believe that "inequities which exist seem to be normal and failure is made to appear as a personal problem". The curriculum is designed to fit all the children attending primary school. Can it be possible that the curriculum has a hidden agenda? It seems to support the belief that curriculum development favours those children who are more capable to engage orally and cognitively to tasks that engage 'mental labour' rather than tasks that engage 'manual

labour' (Lapacinski, 1991). When teachers in Mauritius in the ODEROI (2008) report suggested that the curriculum be downgraded, it may mean that, as Simic and Krstic (2017) argued, teachers want a lowering of the learning criteria. It seems to confirm what Lapacinski is expressing, that is that low-achieving school children's curriculum should be adapted to their needs. The theoretical framework will take into consideration the development of appropriate tools to explore the effect of the curriculum and policy in the classroom as possible predictors of dropping out. Therefore this study will not only shed more light on the difficulties that teachers face to deliver the curriculum to diverse learners but also whether, as suggested by Lapacinski (1991), the curriculum is made so that children feel that they are the ones who have failed the system, are excluded and hence use it as a reason to drop out from school.

We know that each school has its own policy on the way children should conform in school. Other such general policies are provided by the governing education bodies. But how are these rules and disciplines policies applied in schools? Is there a transparency or are children discharged or excluded from school as Riehl (1999) argues? The literature from Rumberger (2001), which also dates back to 2001, sheds new light on the possible intensive involvement of school processes in children's disengagement and/or discharge as mentioned by Riehl (1999). It may also apply to the literature from Howarth (2006). How far does it apply to the Mauritian context which is a middle-income economy? Do OOSC withdraw because of policy decisions taken at school level or even at institutional level, and are our children victims of exclusion? We do not have such information, especially as far as children from low SES families are concerned. We only have the ODEROI (2008) report on ZEP schools and, yet, ten years after, we have no known updated report available. This study will explore and try to understand how the different curriculum and policy decisions have influenced or not the experiences of OOSC in the process of dropping out from school.

SECTION D

2.6 Individual factors influencing dropping out from school

Many researchers have posited that one of the possible factors of disengagement of children from school is individual related (Rumberger, 2001; Foliano, Meschi & Vignoles, 2010; Erktin, Okcabol & Ural, 2010), though the characteristics of such disengagement

may differ. Lack of motivation, self-efficacy and persistence, prior failure, low self-esteem, low aspirations, frequent confrontation with teachers and peers, low level of achievement, poor attendance, non-acceptance by teachers and peers are all characteristics that are put forward as reasons that contribute to drop out, and hence to disengagement. These studies do not aim to present linear cause-and-effect relationships between these characteristics and dropping out. Their aim is to suggest how all these factors may contribute in the long run to a gradual disengagement from schooling by children. They emphasise that there is permutation of multiple factors interacting with each other to influence school dropout.

Nevertheless, Foliano, Meschi and Vignoles (2010) conducted a quantitative study to establish one pattern of linked relationship about the role of individual personal engagement and school characteristics in determining children's disengagement. The study concerned children between 14 and 16 years old and was based on data retrieved from a longitudinal survey of young people in England. They concluded that children who have been victims of bullying and were attending a school where there is fast improvement in performance may be considered to be at risk and the fact of being at risk may be a possible indicator of disengagement. In these circumstances, children no longer enjoyed schooling (Foliano, Meschi & Vignoles, 2010). However, in their conclusion, they cite a previous work by Meschi and Vignoles (2009) where the argument is made that schools (as institutional organisational structures) are least likely to influence children's engagement. This 2009 study seems to suggest that it is rather the personal individual characteristics and family backgrounds of the children that matter most. These studies are notably characterised by their strong interests to isolate causal factors, and do not seem intent on examining the interconnected relationships between the different factors. Perhaps their methodological paradigmatic orientation to seek categorical causal variables has influenced these choices. This interrelationship between multiple factors and how they are experienced in all their interrelated complexities is the subject focus of my study.

Rumberger (2001) acknowledges the fact that the reasons for children to drop out are so complex that it is difficult to find one single factor. Even though some reasons such as school problems, not liking school or teachers or getting a job have been suggested, yet he was concerned that it is difficult to find the causes of why children disengage and

leave school. He used a conceptual framework based on an individual perspective to understand the phenomenon of dropping out. He also tried another framework based on the institutional perspective that focuses on the contextual factors found in the children's family, community, schools and peer group (Rumberger, 2001, p. 5). The study revealed, from an individual perspective, that values, attitudes and behaviour of children towards academic tasks or social dimensions of schooling, are reasons for students' disengagement. Engagement or disengagement can be either academic (school related) and/or social (peers, environment-related). Student stability is also an influence leading to engagement or disengagement and stability depends on the children's background and educational aspirations. Thus, the complexity of understanding children's (dis)engagement is shown by the multiple interactive influences of the individuals, the school and social environment. However, even though literature advocates that disengagement is a child issue, children believe that their disengagement problem is teacher and school related (Hancock & Zubrick, 2015). This study of the literature seems to tell us that there is no certitude as to what causes school dropouts.

On the other hand, Rumberger (2001) also posits that the community, families and schools shape children's behaviour and that disengagement is also contextual and not only individual. However, the study of Rumberger does not tell us what relationships and interactions take place between all these constructs that shape the children's attitudes, values, stability and behaviour. He does not elaborate on what influences these values, attitudes and behaviours towards engagement in learning and engagement in social aspects of schools. The study does not address what happens when children feel that they are not accepted by the school community, be it the administration, teachers or friends. Little insight is offered about how children experience schooling. If what children feel is coupled with repeated low achievement, what are the risks of dropping out? Willms (2003) argues that children may become disaffected because of their low literacy performance or because of their family backgrounds. But are those the only issues that lead to disengagement? How do we explain disaffected children who strive hard to finally succeed? The instruments that will be designed through the theoretical framework will allow an exploration of what influences the children's attitudes, values, stability and behaviour and whether such issues could lead to dropping out of school. This is the gap that needs to be filled to understand the relationship between the life

experiences of children and disengagement. These relationships are so complex that extant literature cannot seem to understand children's experiences in dropping out. This is what the current study aims at.

2.6.1 Dealing with teachers

The above-mentioned literature tends to consider the individual child or the school factors from an adult point of view. From the point of view of children, Murray et al. (2004) tell us that a study was conducted by Potter and Briggs (2003) with children between five and six years old about their early life experiences of schools. They concluded that children dislike "lack of choices in activities, boring classrooms, teachers shouting at students, punishments, blame and unfair treatment, and humiliation in class vis-a-vis their classmates" (Potter and Briggs as cited in Murray et al. 2004, p. 14).

Another study by Kinder, Kendall and Howarth (2000) with children from 11 to 16 (the age group forming part of my study) also showed that children dislike teachers' attitudes and disrespect towards disaffected children. The children in the study were those who were disaffected because of exclusion or attendance problems (Kinder, Kendall & Howarth, 2000 (as cited in Murray et al., 2004, p. 14). The study also took into consideration the peer factors and learning styles of students, giving the impression that teachers in schools do not have enough time to moderate the peer influences for disaffected children. Children are therefore very much aware that the problem of disaffection or disengagement is also teacher and school related.

We can see that there is a difference between the two viewpoints whereby one attributes disengagement to individual aspects while the other seems to point to school issues. This difference between the two viewpoints is in fact an issue that is very often overlooked in academic research, especially when researching child-related issues. Almost all literature tends to give an adult's opinion on issues concerning children whereas very few studies mention the children's point of view. Children's experiences of schooling seen from the children's point of view are quite different from a teacher's point of view. Paley (1986) made it clear that children's ways of thinking and curiosity were very different from our adult perception and expectation. But, at the same time Paley (1986) says that when listening to children talking and responding and querying, we (teachers and researchers) really feel a sense of vulnerability. Thus, listening to

children's voices can destabilise adults' and institutions' solid foundation and question long-established ideas and beliefs. By giving voice to the children in this research, I was prepared to allow the foundation to shake, not with the aim of confrontation, but in order to bring new insight to the dropping out process. Do children, through their various experiences feel disenchanted and disillusioned which ultimately leads to dropping out? If children feel concerned that they may be disenchanted, disillusioned, disengaged, disconnected because teachers do not attend to their expectations, does it therefore lead to dropping out and is it the reason why the practice is not following the policy? This gap will be explored by the instruments developed through the theoretical framework.

2.6.2 Dealing with discipline

We have seen in the literature from Potter and Briggs (2003) that students hated teachers shouting at them. Being shouted at, yelled at, is part of a more global issue called bullying. Ferrell-Smith (2003) sees bullying as a repeated aggressive behaviour in order to voluntarily hurt another person, physically and/or mentally. Bullying is very often related to making use of an imbalanced power in order to victimise. It intends to hurt says Menesini and Salmivalli (2017). It occurs in all societal contexts, including schools. Bullying can be direct (physical or verbal) or indirect (isolation).

Ferrell-Smith (2003) also tells us that research has shown that children who are bullied fear or refuse going to school and have problems focusing on their studies. Yet, not all students bullied underachieve. Are children who are bullied by teachers those that disengage? Menesini and Salmivalli (2017, p. unknown) tell us that "there is more bullying in highly hierarchical classes where peer status or power are concentrated in the hands of a small group of people". We believe that teachers can be classified as those being in power and can therefore be considered as bullies. Are children in schools victims of bullying when being shouted at in classrooms? The theoretical framework will help explore the relationship between bullying and children dropping out from school and its influence on the practice.

2.6.3 Dealing with a locus of control

Although the social and institutional factors that have been discussed above are predictors of school dropout, “these predictors do not provide answers as to how the child arrives at the decision of dropping out” (Chacko, 2007, p. 2.) According to her, two psychosocial factors may be able to enlighten us. These are the locus of control and the second is parent-child discussions. “Locus of control is how strongly a person feels that he or she is in control of his or her life, or has mastery over the challenges and difficulties of life” (Chacko, 2007, p. 2). Our OOSC may have had bad experiences either at home and/or school and we do not know whether they are strong enough to take control of their life and their learning. What would the children in our study say about what has caused their dropping out? Rotter (1992) explains that an individual’s behaviour (or personality) cannot be dissociated from his or her environment. In order to understand a person’s behaviour, we need to know his or her individual life experiences in context with his environment, i.e. what has provoked such an act or behaviour. This brings us to understand what Rotter (1992) refers to as how people believe they get reinforced in life, in other words, their locus of control. Most of the children who ultimately disengage may have failed the different tests at different levels. How does the child explain his or her failure in achievement? Rotter (1992) defines external locus of control, the individual’s way of seeing reinforcements as not dependent on their own action but as something that happens by luck or fate. Hence a child with an external locus of control perceives failure or underachievement as fate and is not dependent on his efforts in learning. But, is that enough for children to disengage from schooling to a point of dropping out? External locus of control can also be perceived by children as being the result of powerful others, says Rotter (1992). OOSC are confronted with many persons in a position of control and power, the teacher, the school administration, the parents, the neighbours and so on. Have these people played a part in the locus of control of the children? Others, therefore, become the reinforcement that they need to mould their behaviour, either positively or negatively. How complex were the life conditions of the children, and have these complexities strengthened them to take control of their life and to do without the external people in power? We thus need to explore more the life experiences of the children and whether the outcomes could be conducive to dropping out.

Sheard (1996) conducted a study to find the correlation between locus of control of early childhood school teachers and their behaviour-management skills. The study (although it was a Master's degree) was conducted with a group of 55 teachers working with three- to five-year-old children in New Jersey. The conclusion was that teachers with an external locus of control are more prone to having difficulty in managing poor behaviour in the classroom as opposed to the teachers having an internal locus of control. Whatever be the level of such a conclusion in academia, both teachers and children form part of the school environment and each can reinforce the other, depending on the types of locus of control.

This point of view is sustained by Simic and Kristic (2017, p. 59) who argue that “teachers feel powerless and insufficiently influential in relation to family and peers”. Teachers believe that dropping out lies within the children, the peers, the family, and hence outside the school context. The study shows that the teachers do not see their own responsibility in the children's dropping out.

If teachers, too, have a locus of control, their personality and behaviour are guided by reinforcement from their environment. When Paley (1986) was distracted by the noises in a class of kindergarten children, she was amazed when she experienced how the children responded to her colleague who came to spend some time with them, by giving her a lot of ideas, as if it was the children who were conducting her class. Since she wanted to have the same effect on children and change her class management style, she changed her teaching and management style when she changed schools. This shows that both children and teachers have their own locus of control and their behaviours are guided by their own reinforcement through their environment. What are these reinforcements and what influence does the environment have on these personality traits?

However, other influences in the environment could act as reinforcers. Some can be socially related such as peers and family issues or school related such as achievement, bullying, teaching, learning and so on. Even though Sheard (1996) searches for the correlation between teachers and classroom management, other above-mentioned influences could be cases worth investigating. While the theoretical framework will help explore the relationship between the life experiences and the dropout process of the participants, we may find out more on the influences of the environment on the

reinforcements that shape the personality and behaviour as well as how these do or do not influence the process of dropping out.

SECTION E

2.7 The education policy at the macro level and its influence on dropping out

Section 2.5.2.1 deals with the influence of the curriculum and policy as a classroom influence. This present subsection reviews the education policy at the macro level and its general influence on school dropouts. This is different from section 2.5.2.1 in that this subsection will try to review and understand how global changes can influence local policies. The various international conferences on education (Jomtein, 1990; Dakar, 2000) have been of influence in the education policies of developing countries. By advocating universal access to education, many countries, including Mauritius, have opted to change their policies to meet all the targets recommended by the conference on education. The problem faced by developing countries is not only to provide universal access to education but it is also to ensure that the children complete basic education. Completing basic education is a means to decrease poverty and also a means to provide meaningful manpower to the development of the economy. However, opening access to children and to ensure their progression has a cost. We are living in a capitalist world and in order to be competitive on the global market economy, developing countries need to search for funding and sponsorship of their education system. The World Bank's recommendations to Mauritius in 1985 remind us of such. The Jomtein conference also reminds us that the world's economy is also changing and for countries to be more competitive in the global market, access to universal education is not sufficient. Policies have also to tackle the changes and challenges in the global market. Therefore, on one hand universal access has become a commitment and at the same time attention has to be given to the quality of education. The different changes and reforms in the Mauritian context are an example of how global competition becomes the subject of changing policies in education almost every five years (see 1.3.2).

The choice that has to be made is very often not only economic, but also political. Opening up access to education, whether at primary, secondary or tertiary levels has political implications (Mauritius is an example, see 1.3.2). In Mauritius, this political

issue may also have cultural and religious connections and influence on the policy decisions (1.3.2).

However, the OECD has recommended that interventions be carried out in the increase of school time and the improvement of school outcomes in order to help policy makers and sponsorship agencies to invest in the education sector (Damon, Glewwe, Wisniewski & Sun, 2016).

By following these recommendations, developing countries will increase the pressure from the earlier stages of education, especially if there is no equity in the education system. The CREATE report has recommended that efforts should be made to keep a balance in the individual characteristics, household characteristics, community, school and policy issues if we want meaningful and equitable access and progression. The literature in the above sections has shown that disengagement is a complex issue involving the relationship and interrelationship between the individual, the family, the community, the institutions and the policy. My aim is to understand these relationships and how they influence children's dropping out of school.

SECTION F

2.8 Setting up a framework for the research study

The review of literature chapter has shown the process of dropping out of school as a slow process of disengagement of children. It is in itself neither irreversible nor influenced by only one particular factor, but by different factors that form part of the life experiences of the child. The review of the literature has shown many gaps that need to be filled, especially as far as the interactions between the individual, the family, the relatives and peers, the community and the school are concerned. The experiences of the children are found within these interactions and it is my concern to understand how it has led to children's dropping out of school. This justifies the synthesis of the above discussion in sections A to E into a coherent theoretical lens which will guide the design of instruments for this study. The different factors in the review of the literature show that many co-affecting factors influence a child's growth and development. Ettekal and Mahoney (2017, p. 1) tell us that the ecological systems theory "explains how the human development is influenced by different types of

environmental systems”. This development occurs over time and involves a complex interaction within the child and between the child and his environment he or she lives in (Ettetal & Mahoney, 2017). I therefore opted for Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) ecological theory as a theoretical framework in order to develop the instruments for the study and to collect data. My aim was to explore and understand how the children developed and experienced their childhood and Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system, which is composed of five socially organised subsystems (Bronfenbrenner 1994), seems to be quite appropriate. These subsystems range from the microsystem, in which the child interacts directly with his environment such as the school, his peers and family up to the macrosystem influencing his experiences over time. These different layers (which will be explained below) interact and influence, directly (proximal environment) or indirectly (distal environment) the child’s development and experiences over time

The micro-system, which is the closest level and which interacts directly with the individual, is usually composed of the family, the peers, the school and the community. We have seen in the literature review that for children to drop out from school, there is an interaction within the individual and between the individual and the different components of the micro-system, like family, relatives, peers, the classroom, the school and so on. Literature from Vitario, Larocque, Janosz and Tremblay, (2001) tells us that an early disruptive personal profile, low achievement in school, lack of parental support and supervision are predictable factors for early dropout from schooling for children. Hymel, Comfort, Schonert-Reichl, and McDougall (1996) also suggest that peer influences are also possible reasons for early dropouts. All these factors are found at the micro-level of what Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) ecological model of human development described as the micro-system. The interaction between an individual and his environment is what shapes an individual over time. However, the current study intends to understand how the relationships between the elements of the micro-system, over time, lead to children dropping out from school. When we talk of disengagement as a slow process, we know that over time, the child’s behaviour and personality are shaped by the reinforcements from the environment as suggested by Rotter (1992) and this is what literature has not been able to tell us.

However, the child’s environment is filled with different microsystems and according to Bronfenbrenner (1994), in trying to understand human behaviour, one must consider the

whole ecological system, comprising not only the micro-system, but also the linkages between elements of the micro-system.

The mesosystem “comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p40).for example, the relations between the children’s home and the school also influence the child’s development and experiences. The child is both present in the home and the school setting.

The third outermost level is what Bronfenbrenner (1994) calls the exosystem. Ettekal and Mahoney (2017) tell us that this level includes the elements of the microsystems of the child in which the child evolves but in which he or she may not be directly embedded. It is possible, for example, that the father of an individual has not received his wage at the end of the week and this, although it does not have a direct impact on the child, influences what happens in the family and most probably in school. Another such example is when the parents cannot attend to teachers’ call at school. This in turn may influence the child experiences in school.

The fourth layer, the macrosystem, encompasses cultural and societal beliefs in general and serves as an overarching influence of the bio-ecological model. It englobes “the beliefs system, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs life-styles that are embedded in each of the broader systems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1994 p. 40). Gender issues, like masculinity or femininity are examples of the micro-system which influence all the other systems.

The chronosystem, “encompasses change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person but also the environment in which that person lives” (Bronfenbrenner, 1994 p. 40).

We have seen in the literature that disengagement is a slow process and time and stability are important factors in child development. This element of time is what Bronfenbrenner calls the chronosystem. The element of time demonstrates how changes take place within the development of a child. For example, a change in the family composition and a change of school may have its importance in the child’s development.

However, Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield and Karnik (2009, p. 199) tell us that Bronfenbrenner's theory has been one that has been continually in a state of development, reassessed, revised and extended. In the bio-ecological theory "reciprocal interaction between an individual and environments, incorporating persons, objects, and symbols is defined as proximal process" (Griffore & Phenice, 2016, p. 11). Hence, interaction is not unidirectional but bi-directional. For the purpose of this study, I have worked in the post-1990s version, believing that the interactions between the individual and his microsystems are reciprocal in nature.

Critiques of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model focus on the lack of individual interaction in the earlier models of the researcher. This is put forward by Christensen (2016) who believes that Bronfenbrenner theory does not allow us to see what is above the micro-level. There are relationships, according to him, that exist within individuals, the initiative to take risk, to fulfil their own needs, to be creative. Not foregrounding these interaction within the individual may impede the understanding of the child's experiences. However, Christensen (2016,) tells us that one of the major critique of the bio-ecological theory is that it does not leave space for interaction with the macro-environment. He mentions "a macro-environment in which political, economic, social, technological and environmental factors depend on each other and influence everyday life in a way which has been stressed, not the least by globalisation and information technology where knowledge processes among individuals have become more diversified" (Christensen, 2016, p. 25). Another weakness of Bronfenbrenner's theory is that no allowance is made for resiliency of the individuals. Resiliency promotes hope which enhances achievement towards a specific goal, about reaching one's dream.

[Figure 2.1](#) ~~Figure 2.1~~ shows a model of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory. The diagram shows the interactions within the individual and the relationship of the individual with his or her immediate environment within the micro-system. It also shows how the different systems interact with the individual and the environment. In the current study, I will try to understand the relationship within the individual and the relationship between the different parts of the micro-system of the child. These microsystems may be the relationship between the child and the family, the child with relatives, the child with peers, the child with the school setting, and so on. The study will also allow me to understand the different relationships between the different

systems and how such relationships influence the microsystems. The elements of the microsystems are all present in extant literature and are described as factors that influence disengagement. My aim is to understand the relationships between the interaction of the different systems and to explore the influences in the life experiences of children that leads to the disengagement process and whether such disengagement is a gateway for children to drop out from school. The idea is to explore the interrelationships between the different elements described in Bronfenbrenner's, over time.

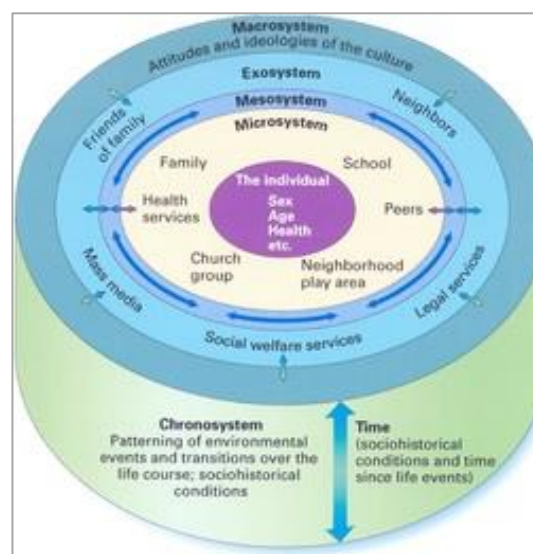


Figure 2.1: Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory

Source: Wikipedia

However, due to the weaknesses of the theory, possibilities exist that the model may not provide a powerful analytical lens as there may not be enough exploration within the individual and his relationship with himself, the influences of globalisation on the process of disengagement and the resiliency of children to resist such influences. Thus, using Bronfenbrenner theory is useful in tapping those elements mentioned and to develop the instruments for the collection of data as mentioned above, but it may not suffice during the inter-relational analysis of the influences between the individual and the other social and institutional influences on one hand and the individual influences on the other hand, within a global market economy context

However, the model is being used to design the instruments and to collect the data. Even though the literature has proposed the three factors of disengagement, we will need to get the life experience of the child in each issue of the micro-system in order to make relationships through the participants' stories. An analysis of each interaction and the relationship between the elements of the model over time may be time-consuming.

An analytical framework that was used to make sense of the data emerging from the narratives was the force-field model proposed by Samuel (2008). In his model Samuel (2008) proposes that the identity of teachers are being pushed and pulled in a variety of forces that are neither coherent nor stable. The forces he identified are forces related to *biographical* forces (linked to the individual teacher's personal history emerging from their homes, communities and localised cultural practices and backgrounds); *programmatic* forces (linked to the kinds of educational curricular interventions they encountered in their training as teachers); the *institutional* forces (linked to the ethos of specific spaces within which teachers practice their teaching) and *macro-contextual forces* (linked to wider systemic challenges and interactive influences of a broader societal /national or global agenda. This model was used by Samuel (2008, p. 3) as a means "to understand the complexity of forces influencing teachers' identities, and shows why there is a need for creative discursive spaces for the coexistence of these many forces". In my study I choose to foreground how these forces may also be interpreted as affecting the kinds of experiences that out of school children experience as they negotiate the contexts of their own biographies, their curricular and institutional spaces within wider developing world context of Mauritius.

There may be different forces, influences and relationships that are located within the family settings, the peers and relatives, the environment, the learners' personal attitudes and so on and Bronfenbrenner's theory gives the possibility to tap all the different eco-systems in which the child lives in order to see what the connections are that trigger dropping out. When developing a strategy for the field-work, I have in my sample, children who are between 11 and 16 years of age and who have dropped out from school after the CPE examination. The types of family they live in, the interaction with the family and relatives and peers, the relationship with the school, teachers and administrators, the relationship with the community are all issues explored during the data collection process.

The proposed analytical lens will take into consideration the different forces and influences in-school, out-of-school and the individual's own influences. Samuel (2008, p 11) used a 'a Force Field Model of Teacher Development' as he believed that there were several forces that "push and pull teachers' role and identity in different directions" (Ibid). Although the concept of Force Field model is used in management where there are different driving forces and restraining forces that allows or restricts changes (Jenkins, 1949), I may adapt the model used by Samuel, to accommodate the forces exerted by the school context, the out of school context and the individual forces. I believe that the current study goes beyond the development of children as it delves into their life to find out how they have lived their school life and family life and how these experiences have influenced their engagement or disengagement from schooling. By making use of the adapted Force Field model, I will be able to capture the resiliency of the individuals.

2.9 Chapter synthesis

The first five sections of this chapter explored what extant literature says about the different components in a child's life and which may explain how children experience schooling in their everyday life. It has also argued for a relationship between the process of dropping out and children's disengagement. I have explored the personality related factors, the socially related factors and the institutionally-related factors that could influence students' disengagement. This has revealed several gaps which will be under study in the following chapters. However, I have added a fourth factor which I believe is important as we shape and we are shaped by the macro-contextual factor, i.e. forces of influence do not happen in a vacuum but within a particular context and this context influences and is influenced by economical, societal, individual and political issues. Drawing from the synthesis of extant literature about factors influencing children's dropping out of school, the chapter presented Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory as theoretical framework for the production of data for this study. A temporary analytical lens is also proposed in order to make up for the weaknesses of Bronfenbrenner's theory. I refer here to an adapted version of a Force Field model because I believe that several forces allow and restrain the influences of dropping out. Through the analysis of the relationships between the life experiences of children and dropping out, I will be able to understand more the different relationships that interact between the

microsystems of the child and how these experiences ripple through the other systems over time. One of the concerns in the CREATE study (see Chapter 1) on school dropouts is the fact that little is known about the relationships between the different constructs that lead to disengagement and the reasons how and why it happens (Hunt, 2008). We know that disengagement is not a single event but a series of events, situation and contexts which work together to produce school dropouts (Hunt, 2008, p. 4).

The next chapter will describe the methodological aspect of the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

3.1 Overview

This study aims to provide insight into the OOSC children's experiences of pre-primary and primary schooling which may or may not have influenced their dropping out of formal schooling. It aims to connect more generic life experiences to explore their relationship or lack thereof to schooling experiences. Whilst previous chapters have helped me outline the context and rationale for this study, the overview of the present literature related to this phenomenon and development of a theoretical lens to guide data production, this present chapter will outline the research methodology adopted in this study. It will focus on the theoretical and operational aspects underpinning research design choices, including the selection of my participants and the instruments to capture and analyse the data.

3.2 Orientation to Chapter 3

Chapter 2 provided an insight into the theoretical framework of the study where Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory has been used initially to develop a working model for the collecting of data. A force-field model which will be used as an analytical lens to make up for the weaknesses of the theory and through which children's experiences in school, out of school and with the self, will be analysed. This chapter of research methodology will chart the route of the researcher to enter the field in a more organised way. The focus will be on the following sections.

Section A covers the methodological design by putting emphasis on the interpretivist's approach to qualitative study. The section also highlights the methodological approach to the study. Section B highlights the data production process. Focus has been put on entering the field to get acquainted with the environment, the acquaintance period, the procedures to obtain the parents' and participants' consent are explained and the reasons for the choice of the interview site are given. Section C focuses on the instruments used for the study, the transcription phase of the interviews and the document collection needed for the study.

Section D highlights the different levels of analysis phases through which mean co-constructed with the participants. It focuses on coding the data, getting familiarised with the data, the preparation of the data and the transcription and writing of the narratives.

Section E explains how I ensured rigour in the study. I have taken into consideration issues of trustworthiness, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The ethical considerations established during pre-field, in-field and post-field work are discussed. This chapter ends with the synthesis (3.8) of the chapter.

SECTION A

3.3 Methodological approach to the study

This study concerns exploring the life experiences of OOSC, from the time they joined pre-primary schooling until the time they ended their primary school and up to the age of 16. Ontologically, this research approach adopts the view that there is no one single truth. Instead emphasis will be put on the experiences of the children themselves as they reflect on their in- and out-of-school lives. OOSC are given the opportunity to express the way they have experienced schooling as a learner. Children's voices have been captured and interpreted in order to construct multiple realities as opposed to positivist ontology where there is a single, objective reality to a research question (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). By acknowledging that realities are constructed, are multiple and subjective, this qualitative study has adopted the interpretivist paradigm. From an epistemological point of view, truth will be built from the researcher's and the participants' experiences of how we understand the world. Creswell (1998, p. 15) defines a qualitative study "as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting".

In this research, I needed to gather a deep understanding of the life experiences of OOSC of formal schooling and to find what (if any) are the relationships with dropping out from school and these life experiences. As opposed to the positivist paradigm, which is objectivist by nature, using the interpretivist paradigm allows me, as researcher "to understand the subjective world of human experience" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison,

2000, p. 21). My aim is "to set out an interpretation of my participants' world" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 22) and to do so, I have built up a relationship based on honesty, confidence and trust with my participants. Interpretation is negotiated with the participants and not imposed. This approach that stems from hermeneutics, deals with extracting deeper meanings in discourse obtained from personal narratives or observed behaviours (Geertz, 1973). Reality is socially constructed (Mertens, 2005) and in this case, it is the participants' points of view that will be grounded into theory. Theory follows the report, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000).

Pham (2018, pp. 3-4) tells us that when using the interpretivists' paradigm, researchers can conduct the research in its natural setting "by utilising key methodologies [such] as grounded theory, ethnography, case studies or life-histories to gain the insider's insights of research's objects to provide with more authentic information related to the object of the research". I have therefore opted to choose a life-history methodology. According to Goodson and Sikes (2001), life historians search for insights and aspects to questions that will influence social life of an individual. This is important because individuals have different ways of experiencing life and it helps those individuals to make sense of their roles in society. This will help raise the curtain on the world of the participants. The purpose of using a life-history research lies in the understanding of "the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, and how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future" (Roberts 2002, p. 1). I needed to capture the experiences and actions of the participants, as these life-experiences may have had an impact on their experience of schooling and, maybe, vice-versa and have slowly led to disengagement and dropping out from school.

I have used a methodology which is more adapted to capturing the complex essence of human nature. Interpretive approaches rely heavily on naturalistic methods (interviewing and observation and analysis of existing texts) (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Hence, the narrative inquiry methodology has been used. According to Clandinin and Huber (in press), narrative inquiry is a process of entering into lives in the midst of each participant's and each inquirer's life. It is a way of understanding experience narratively. Life, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 17) is filled with fragments of narratives that have occurred over time and space and which are

“reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities”. It is the study of experience as a story. Education and educational studies are a form of experience and the best way to reflect and understand experiences is through narratives. Dhunpath and Samuel (2009) state that the use of narrative methodology is not coincidental as there is a need for us, researchers to tell about the lives of the participants with whom we are working. Hence, by using narrative methodology, I have been able to narrate what OOSC have experienced during their pre-primary and primary schooling whilst at the same time living some experiences in their own real world and environment. I believe that whatever happens, schooling experiences cannot be dissociated from a child’s life and vice-versa. Through close analysis of the narratives of the participants, their words, actions and records will be used to give meaning to the children’s experiences. By examining the patterns of meaning which have emerged from the data which has been presented in the collaborators’ own words, and together with my own personal experience, I have given meaning to the participants’ words I could have envisaged using vignettes to represent the narratives of the participants. According to Erfanian, Roudsari, Heydari and Bahmani (2020) who were aiming to provide thorough information about the vignette technique and searching through databases, vignettes are of great help with sensitive and difficult topics as they are most efficient when members have to express their opinions in a group. In my study it was considered that the rich narrative records which synthesised the various data sources were considered adequate to fulfil the purpose of the evocative potential of vignettes. The narratives themselves embedded emblematic key turning points and events which could be said to serve as a form of a vignette.

3.3.1 The research field

The research was conducted with children who were out of school and who were at least 16 years old at the time of the study. They come from different regions of the country and are actually attending non-formal education at Morning-Star NGO (non-formal education means that the institution does not run courses as per the curriculum prescribed by the Ministry of Education). Morning-Star is situated in the western region of the Island, at West Bromwich. Founded in 1978, the aim of Morning-Star is to accommodate children in difficulties in society within a healthy living environment and way of life. Morning Star serves both the purpose of being a shelter for children and at

the same time provide non-formal education to OOSC. Two of the main objectives of the NGO (as a shelter) are, amongst others, to

“Provide alternative care services, in the best interest of the child and in collaboration with biological parents and relatives whenever possible

- a. Of a residential nature in ways conducive to the overall development of children, especially through the setting up of
 - i. family-type structures (foster care) for young children and
 - ii. youth homes
- b. (and as a non-formal education institution) Of a non-residential nature through the setting up of appropriate creative and cultural educational preschool structures and appropriate creative and cultural educational, prevocational and vocational structures for children who are out of the mainstream system of education and training”

(Fondation pour L'enfance (website), 2008)

The staff of the NGO are all employed by the institution and funded mostly by corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects by private companies, for example 47% of the expenses for the year 2015 (Fondation pour L'enfance, 2008). Other funding is from the welfare system, through a social grant allowance for children in shelters, for the children who are in residential care and who come from a hostile environment (41% of 2015 expenses (Ibid)). These children are referred to the NGO by the Child Development Unit (CDU) with a committal order from the court (Fondation pour L'enfance, 2008). The NGO claims its uniqueness by a residential project based on group foster family units in the community providing care to not more than six children per unit. It also encourages the conventional foster family to take charge of one or two children in their midst. The NGO also provides a youth home service (called a shelter) for boys who are in need of greater autonomy and independence.

Morning-Star also provides a non-residential care service in: four units at Le Valet⁵, Beauty Pond, Big Bay and Bromwich West, comprising a nursery, a pre-school unit, and a school support-service; educational and training services for children out of the mainstream education and training system at the 'Atelier du Savoir' (ADS) which functions as a special education needs (SENs) school; a food aid programme for needy families; three training courses approved by the Mauritius Qualification Authority; a garden to develop the senses of children designed as a place of discovery to bring children closer to nature (Fondation pour L'enfance, 2008).

The staff consists of two social workers, a teaching staff of six, two of whom have specialised SENs training from the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE).

Hence, Morning-Star offers on one hand a residential service (the shelter and foster family units), considered to be a place of safety (Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare (2015), for children of different ages channelled by the CPU and on the other hand an informal SENS school service through its knowledge hub (ADS). Children in residence are usually children beyond control (a term contested by the Ombudsperson for Children) or whose families can no longer cater for their needs. Children not in residence, attending ADS, live usually in their own families or with foster families but who are for one reason or another out-of-school. Children in residence follow informal education at ADS until the age of 16, after which they are sent to different private firms on placement. They leave the residence on their 18th birthday, whilst children not in residence can stop informal education at any time they want. There is also an administrative block that functions independently from the formal residential and ADS child unit.

Originally, my sample consisted of five participants, Pravin and Manuel, both aged 16 and residents of the shelter at Morning-Star and at the same time finishing their last year at ADS. They were denied access formal secondary education. The other two participants of my sample attend the ADS and are living in their own families. Byron, 16

⁵ Names withheld

and Ludivin 16, live with their family and Louis, 15, is a resident of SOS Village Mauritius, another NGO and shelter that offers a residential structure under a foster-mother care to children just like Morning-Star. Unfortunately, despite having been given a verbal agreement at the time I chose to sample Louis, I was refused consent by the social worker of SOS village (see more on sampling, 3.3.4.1). Both Byron and Ludivin had completed their CPE and joined the prevocational stream before they dropped out. The participants are more or less illiterate, despite having gone through seven years of primary schooling (except in the case of Ludivin who has attended school since the age of 10). The parents are either working as manual workers or cleaners or are housewives and they are mostly wage earners.

3.3.2 Report on pilot study

A pilot study was performed prior to the field work. It was not easy to obtain an informal institution to conduct my piloting due to the high level of confidentiality needed and heads of the institutions were not prepared to take that risk. Instead, I chose to conduct my piloting in a formal secondary school. After obtaining permission from the manager of the school, I sampled three students from the prevocational section. All the students in the pilot-sample had failed the CPE and have opted to continue their studies in the PVE. For the sampling, I observed the children in class for about two weeks before making a choice. The participants were all students of the third-year class, who were in their last year of study. The parents' and participants' consent were obtained for two of the three participants. The interviews of Madan and Pierre Louis were conducted in the office of the Section Leader of the prevocational students. A report was then produced with the following issues that needed remedy. The interview was too fast, and I did not give enough time for the participants to answer. Furthermore, the questions were not open-ended and the participants responded with very short answers. The interview was not really a dialogue as there was too much intervention from the researcher. A fresh interview schedule was prepared for the second interview which worked more or less well. I also found out that there was a lot of background noise and interruptions because the location was not appropriate. I conducted the interview in the Section Leader's office and it was too close to the classes and the school yard. I, therefore, had to choose a proper place for interview for my research participants.

The other issue that was raised during my piloting was that the language to be used for the participants should be more child-centred rather than researcher-centred. The Creole language was used for the interview, but the language has different nuances when spoken by different components of society, depending on the class of the person. Children do not understand the language when it is spoken by a person who is fully literate, because the Creole language has either a French touch or an English touch. Spoken Creole varies according to status (Sonck, 2005).

During the transcription, I also had a problem in Creole writing. This was solved when we attended a seminar on using 'Graffi Larmoni', a standardised Creole dialect. This seminar was organised by the MIE.

3.3.3 Research strategy

I was searching for an informal institution offering informal classes to children out of school. I came across Morning-Star NGO that was within walking distance from my place of residence. The institution was situated in a remote sub-rural/urban region. Bromwich West is identified as sub-rural/urban because it is composed of several real-estate complexes along the coastal region whilst keeping its initial village-like area. The NGO is situated in one of these village-like areas called "camps" (regions where sugar-cane workers were staying during post-colonial Mauritius). I sought permission from the director and obtained his signed consent to conduct my research at the institution (see Appendix 2). Once the consent was obtained, I asked for ethical clearance from the Ethical committee (see Appendix 1).

A time line table giving the details of when I joined, end of March- which year and when the pilot study was conducted is given in the table below. Also, details of the acquaintance period are given.

I then joined the institution as a helper, under the guidance of the assistant-director, and I helped during the ICT classes in order to get acquainted with the children and vice-versa (see Table 3.1 for the time line of research). But helping in a quite structured setting was not appropriate to get acquainted to the children as they had their class to follow. Therefore, I asked the director permission to be on my own, in a more accessible place for the children to come to me. I subsequently was on my own at a working table

with my tablet, mobile, and laptop. I was slowly approached by some children wanting to play the games that I was offering them on these electronic gadgets. The children were slow in adapting and communicating and I needed time to build up a trusting relationship before approaching them to join my research. Using the ICT media communication devices was a way for me to talk to them individually without the constraints of a formal classroom environment. However, there were some power-related issues at times, especially when the children started swearing at each other. As the children became accustomed, they directed me to what types of games they wanted as those that were on my devices were too childish. I obliged.

Table 3.1: Timeline for research

Joined Morning-Star as helper Acquaintance period	August 2014
Consent from gatekeeper	14 December 2014
Ethical clearance	12 February 2015
Pilot study	March 2015
Consent from parents	May 2015
Consent from participants	June 2015
Interviews	As from October 2015
Translation and trans-literation done	As from April 2016

Hence, I have been in the field for more than a year in order to get acquainted with the environment, the language, the attitudes and the children in out-of-school conditions. On obtaining my ethical clearance certificate, my visits to Morning-Star became more frequent, first because the group of children working with me was more consistent and secondly, I needed time to get them interested in my project and research. Therefore it was not possible for me to work with a large group. The identification of possible

participants was done jointly with the social worker and the head of animator/assistant director. Both of them would facilitate my access to the parents/care-givers in order to obtain their consent (see appendix 3). All the children at Morning-Star were considered as out-of-school children, ranging from five or six years old to 18 years old but as mentioned above, some were residents of the shelter. It was up to me to identify those who have sat for the Certificate of Primary Education (further sampling issues are explained in paragraph 3.3.4.1). The participants were identified around the end of March, and together with the help of the social workers, I was able to contact the parents/care-givers to explain the reason of my presence and the need to do the study. This parental contact was done at a later stage after having obtained the acceptance of the participants to the study. From the response obtained, I proceeded to obtain their consent and the children's consent (see Appendix 5). This was a tedious task as a lot of explanation had to be done about the purpose of the research to both parents and participants to be as they were all almost illiterate. I also had to explain to the participants their rights to accept/reject giving their consent and that they could pull out at any time they wanted. Feedback would be given to them and at any time during the transcription I would call them back for further clarifications. I planned to conduct the interviews of one participant before proceeding to the other. Each interview would be audio recorded, transferred from audio to text in the participant's mother tongue, Creole, then translated from Creole to English and finally transcribed for the purpose of the supervisor and examiners and an international audience. I would then go back to the participants to clarify points that were not clear or which I needed to explore further. This process of clarification was also taped, transferred from audio to text in Creole, translated to English and transcribed. After this, from the data obtained during the interviews, the reflexive journal, observations and visits to the participant's original environment, I would proceed to write the narratives. I would then go back to the participants for a member-check of the narratives. As the narratives would be in English, I would verbally synthesise the transcript and read it in Creole to the participant and he/she would have a say in accepting or rejecting any information that they have provided and that has been storied. This was a tedious task as there were two sets of interviews per participant, hence two audio-to-text versions, two translated versions of audio-to-text in English and two transcript versions. After reading of the two transcripts, I needed to go back for clarification followed by at least one audio-to-text, one

translated version and one transcript (Extracts in Appendices 7 and 8). There would also be a series of narratives writing and re-writing until the useful copy was achieved. This needed also at least one member-check, until the final co-constructed version of the narrative was produced. This whole process of narrative production would have to be performed for five participants, which showed clearly how the narrative production would be lengthy and time-consuming. Finally, when Louis did not obtain consent, the narrative production was done for four participants.

3.3.4 The participants

3.3.4.1 *Sample selection*

I needed my participants to be children who had sat for the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) and who had not succeeded. They may or may not have joined the PVE but in any case they have become dropouts before the age of 16. For this reason, I chose purposive sampling since all the participants were chosen on the basis of being CPE children who had dropped out of school. It is understood that I was not aiming at generalisation, therefore there was no need for me to have a random sampling (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). I also needed children who were readily available in terms of time and who were eloquent and ready to tell me their stories as suggested by Goodson and Sikes, (2001).

Goodson and Sikes (2001) state that participants in purposive sampling are selected as they meet certain criteria. As mentioned above, the criteria through which my sampling was done were that the participants had all sat for the CPE twice, had failed to be promoted in the formal schooling system or had attended PVE in a secondary institution but then dropped out from formal education before the age of 16. As I proceeded with the interview, the following concepts were explored, namely, their interaction with, among others, the family, relatives, peers, neighbourhood and schooling. These interactions explored were in line with the chosen theoretical framework. In fact, all these factors may be responsible for disengagement of the participant as suggested by extant literature. I consider these theoretical constructs to be useful because a child does not evolve in a vacuum, but instead he progresses in harmony with his environment and everything that is related closely or by far has an impact on the child. Therefore, the wider the spectrum of the constructs touched upon, the closer I will get to the

purpose of the study. If I want to understand the experiences of the participants during his school time, these constructs will be used as a foundation that would help me later to develop a theory that would emerge from the data obtained (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Other variables such as ethnicity, race, gender, were not considered as I believe that these issues may or may not automatically emerge from the study. These constructs have been mentioned as being the key issues in the disengagement of children from school. At the same time, informally, during the acquaintance period I became aware of the conditions in which they were living in. Below is a sample grid used for the study.

Table 3.2: Sampling grid

	Have sat and failed CPE and dropped out
Manuel	✓
Pravin	✓
Byron	✓
Ludivin	✓

I established the profile of the participants during my acquaintance period (see 3.4.1 below) and after having obtained the parents' consent. While the children were playing their games on my tablet, mobile and computer, I had informal conversations with them and that was how I was able to establish their profile.

SECTION B

3.4 Data production process

3.4.1 Entering the field to get acquainted

I chose to conduct my study at Morning-Star NGO, as mentioned in 3.3.1. Two of my participants, Manuel and Pravin, were members of the shelter and having informal classes provided by the centre, while the other two, Ludivin and Byron were having informal classes at the same centre after having dropped out of their respective prevocational institutions. I have opted for the pseudonym of Morning-Star, because the NGO welcomes all the most vulnerable children with an underprivileged background. The

Government of Mauritius defines vulnerable children as “children who have learning difficulties arising from social problems (vulnerable groups)” (Ministry of Education and Human Resources, 2006, p. 7). It is like a star in the morning for the children who attend the informal institution, as since their arrival, they are provided with a breakfast and a lunch for the day. For most of the children, the breakfast and lunch would be their only meals of the day. Most of the children attending the institution have had a behaviour problem in their previous institutions, according to the administration of the institution, and Morning-Star is the only NGO that is registered by the Government of Mauritius to care for children with behavioural problems as special needs as compared to other SEN school with children with other types of disabilities (This policy is no longer implemented at this date). As it is a duly registered SEN school, the NGO receives a grant for the running of the centre (Ministry of Education and Human Resources, 2006, p. 15). The NGO also receives a social-aid grant for each member who is in foster-care and in the shelter, called an inmate’s allowance (National Pensions Act, 1976). The teachers at Morning-Star are entitled to follow a course in SEN education offered by the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE). To date, two teachers out of six are fully qualified SEN educators. The NGO also provides residential services through either foster care or youth homes for boys for their residential inmates and non-residential services through educational training. The training in informal instructions are provided to children out of the main stream, nursery and pre-school services. The training courses offered to children are approved by the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA). The objectives of the MQA are “to develop, implement and maintain a National Qualifications Network, to ensure compliance with provisions for registration and accreditation in the Mauritius Qualifications Authority Act; to ensure that standards and registered qualifications are internationally comparable” (MQA Act, 2001, p. i).

My engagement with the centre started in August 2014 during my acquaintance period with the children. Several children were interested in joining me to play games on the tablet, mobile and laptop. Some were young while others, the more mature ones tried to hoard the gadgets and keep the younger ones at bay. Once I was certain of their age I asked them (the mature ones, as I needed them to be able to speak freely) if they were interested to join my research. I explained to them what the research was about and asked them if they were willing to share their experiences with me. Five of them readily accepted; I felt that most probably they felt the need to share their experiences. I kept

the other children working with me, even though they did not agree to be participants in my research. At the same time I proceeded to get the acceptance of the gate-keeper and conditions under which access would be given to me by the centre. I suggested to the Director of the NGO that as a quid pro quo for my access to the school, I would help in the ICT department, a request which was accepted. I was going to be known as a trainee, unlike the teachers, who were known as animators. The animators were employed by the NGO and their tasks were to give specific lessons to the children. The NGO is used to accommodate trainees from different countries sponsored by different international NGOs as exchange programmes. A trainee is a non-remunerated learner who proposes some activities to the children only under the supervision of an animator. I was to have access to the students under the supervision of an animator. Very often, the trainees are posted by international NGOs to acquire experiences in the field. For the children in the centre (except those who agreed to join the research), I was simply another trainee who had come to propose some activities and mine was in the field of ICT.

3.4.2 The acquaintance period

I want here to emphasise the importance of an acquaintance period, especially when conducting research on children. The children were mostly illiterate and most of them were vulnerable children, i.e., children who were exposed to adult authority (Henry, 2012), either at home or in the shelters. The children see in an adult who tries to “impose” an activity, which most probably they did not want to participate in, as a person of authority, a teacher. So, it was important to inform the children that such was not the case with me and that my presence in the centre was mainly for research purposes. Despite that, it was necessary for me to build up trust in the relationship between the future participants and myself, otherwise they would not dare confide in me. Furthermore, I needed to get to know the future participants, their modes of expression as illiterate children, their likes and dislikes. Hence, there was a two-sided element of trust that needed to be established. The participants needed to trust me and I also needed to trust them and this trust should be visible and consistent.

There was also a need to be accepted and trusted by the animators of the centre. I needed to attend the different meetings held every morning prior to the start of the activities of the day. Very often confidential information was exchanged and, as the

animators knew that I was there for research, there might have been a perception that whatever was being told would be used in the research. I needed to build up that element of trust also, because as I was introduced as an ICT trainee, I wanted to make it clear to them that I was assigned the status of a trainee for official purposes but, in fact, I was here to research on out-of-school children at the institution. This relationship also took time to be established with the animators and especially the social worker because I needed their help to reach out to the parents of the children chosen.

My encounter with the children in the computer laboratory did not allow me to get acquainted with the children as it was difficult for me to get their attention. The reasons were that most of the computers were not in working condition. Moreover, the animator was most of the time dealing with cases of misbehaviour or the children who were running away from the class. The children were quite unruly and I really felt that the children did not want to be in the computer laboratory to learn “basic word-processing” but they were more interested in playing games. The reason may have been that they were illiterate and some of them could not even identify alphabets and upper-case characters. I decided that if I wanted to get the future participants to get used to me, I would rather work on my own (see 3.3.3). Once I had identified the possible participants, I needed to discuss with the head-animator and the social worker about my decision to work on my own. I also needed to get more biographical information about my possible participants. I informed the head-animator and the social worker of my choice.

However, I have noticed that the children felt more valorised when I used the latest IT tools, as usually they did not get access to those gadgets like a tablet or smart phone. This served to build up the element of trust that was needed and facilitated communication between me, the researcher, and the participants. Children felt valorised when they were given the possibility to choose the games they wanted to play, especially the participants who were in the shelter. Children in a shelter are denied these facilities as well as access to WiFi. The children who were given such facilities (of using the IT tools) were more receptive to the activity and waited gleefully for my arrival. However, I felt sorry that I was not able to accommodate more children in my group.

3.4.3 Parent's and participant's consent

Once the choice of my participants confirmed (see 3.3.4), I proceeded to get the parents'/care-givers' consent to carry out my research with their children/wards. Manuel* and Pravin are children in residential care, so permission was sought from their youth leaders via the social worker of the centre. Jean Louis* is from a foster-care village and consent was sought from the village mother. Byron* and Ludivin* live with their biological parents and permission was sought via the social worker of the centre. Unfortunately, the consent for Jean Louis was not obtained because I was informed by the social worker of the village that the CDU objected. Though I tried to get a written version of the decision, I was never able to obtain it and Jean Louis stopped attending Morning-Star. I had to remove Jean Louis from the sample list.

After consent had been obtained, the participants' official consent was obtained, though previously, during the acquaintance period, their agreement to participate in the study was obtained.

3.4.4 Choice of the interview site

I was offered the facility of using the centre's guest room to conduct my interviews. But with the children's consent, I opted for a power-free location situated close to the seaside called "Jardin D'Eveil", a garden in a natural setting.

As I needed to be accompanied when I was with the children of the centre, I asked the social worker who is also a therapist to be with me at the site, but out of hearing. The centre put at my disposal a sound system to capture the essence of the interview, but I refused and instead used my own recording devices. I used my mobile and a recording device just in case there is a breakdown in one of the devices.

SECTION C

3.5 Instruments used in the study

This section presents details about the instruments used in the study. On entering the field, there was a need to refine the instruments that were to be used. A pilot study was conducted and subsequently a report was presented

3.5.1 Entering the field: Piloting

As mentioned in 3.3.2, my piloting was held at St Clementine secondary school with students who had failed the CPE twice and who were in the prevocational sector. According to Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001), a pilot study is a mini-version of a full study where specific pre-testing of a particular instrument, in my case the interview schedule, is done. Sampson (2004) insists on the importance of piloting as a means to verify the instruments to be used to capture data. But this is not the only purpose of a pilot study. It also foreshadows the problems and limitations that may occur, as no instrument is perfect. It also trains the researcher in the elements of the research process as well as assessing whether the research protocol is realistic and workable, amongst others, according to Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001). Hence, piloting helps improve the internal validity of the instruments as well as of other important functions.

I sought permission from the principal of the secondary institution in order to use his institution for a pilot study. After acceptance, I was introduced to the head of the prevocational department who was to guide me in choosing a class that would suit my convenience. I opted for a class of 15-year-old children, which was closer to my sample. I was introduced to the form mistress of the class who introduced me to the class. I needed to get used to the students and vice-versa and therefore I participated in the class activities as an “observer” for two weeks. After that acquaintance period, I was able to observe three possible participants for my pilot study. I exposed to them my research project and, with the help of the class teacher, I asked consent from the parents of the children. Out of the three, two parents responded positively and sent their consent forms duly signed. Afterwards I asked the participants for their consent, after which the two chosen participants were interviewed and the responses were taped on audio devices. The interviews were conducted on two different days. I obtained permission from the principal to conduct the interviews during school hours as the participants lived quite far away and they could not stay back in the afternoon, after school hours. Two students were chosen and the interviews conducted.

Once the interviews were over, I started transcribing the audio data to text in the language it was conducted, Creole. The text was further translated literally to English and then transcribed for the purpose of supervision. The transcribed texts were sent for mentoring and the feedback obtained was used to write my report on the pilot study

(see 3.3.2). Based on the findings of the report, the instrument was modified accordingly, to suit and pay more attention to the critical questions, such as the experiences at home, in the home and school environment, with their friends and other 'important persons in their life' with whom they developed certain affinities. A modified version of the semi-structured interview schedule was prepared and approved. Furthermore, I needed to get used to the process of transcribing, from audio to Creole text and English text and I was given a seminar in standardised Creole writing by the MIE.

3.5.2 Using the instrument: Interview

Since I needed to capture the children's experiences of over varying historical stages in their schooling, life history interviews were conducted. Davies, Singh, Tebboth, Spear, Mensah and Ansah (2018, p. 5) tell us that "life history interviews are a qualitative method of data collection that elicits written and/or oral narratives through question and answer to describe or comment upon a person's life". The piloting brought issues such as vulnerability and resilience in the fore ground. Therefore, the purpose of using a life history interview was to understand why, how and when the OOSC moved through periods where they were vulnerable and resilient and how they responded to those moments in time. The participants responded to a series of semi-structured questions which have been captured in audio format. The questions ranged from their experiences at home and in their environment, their experiences in school from pre-primary to secondary or pre-vocational, their interaction with their friends and other significant people in their life, their classroom experiences with the teachers, friends, administration e.t.c. The purpose of these questions was to focus on their personal experiences and the relationship between the different components revolving around the participant. The idea was to obtain their experiences and the different positive and negative forces interacting in different situations. Interviews were conducted in a one-to-one situation at "Jardin D'Eveil" except for two participants. Manuel was not allowed to leave the shelter at the time the interview was conducted and Ludivin, being a girl, was not allowed to leave the centre unaccompanied, as the social worker was not available at the time of interview. Manuel's interview was held in his bedroom, the only place where we could talk without external interference and in all confidentiality as he was under the surveillance of the youth leader, he was not to have any contact with the

outside world. Ludivin's interview was held in the guest-room of the centre. None of the participants were within hearing distance of the social worker or head of animators.

However, I wish to point out here that the participants were all illiterate as I needed to read the consent forms with them before they gave their approval. They were also children of 16 years old who had gone through very difficult experiences in life. However, it was difficult for them to express all their feelings and, at times, they even suppressed their feelings. They showed signs of resignation, that is they could not change what has happened. For example, when Manuel expressed that "he did not choose his family", it was a form of resignation, where he accepted the condition in which he was living. Pravin also showed signs of resignation when he related how he "was treated worse than a dog". I have been an educator and administrator for 38 years in education. I have been a young student myself and I have gone through a series of injustices as a learner and later in life as an educator. I devoted my life to working with children in difficulty and with prisoners (as an ICT trainer), understanding their sorrows, sufferings and sadness as if they were mine. Though I considered myself as being one of them, I was very reluctant to exteriorise my feelings. Therefore, I did not expect the participants to open up so much to tell me their feelings, and I was really touched. Perhaps I was a sort of opportunity for them to express their voice. I also noticed at times that they claimed to have forgotten certain events. Forgetting is a way of hiding the hurtful moments that they have lived, that they have pushed back because it is either shameful for them or because it was too painful. This is where more probing was needed and where, maybe sometimes, I introduced a part of myself and my life and experiences, just to get the participant to understand that I have also gone through these feelings. Hence, I needed to bring in my own experiences to shape the answers to the questions and we both came to a set of agreed versions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These agreed versions are re-transcribed with feelings in the narratives. Hence, I had a feeling that I was a researcher being used as a research instrument, notion expressed by Barrett, (2007) who explains how the researcher transforms raw data into data records. These transformations also involve how the researcher gives meaning to, interprets and relates the whole phenomenon to literature. Hence, the omnipresence of the researcher in inquiring and transforming shows that the notion of researcher as instrument is predominant in qualitative research.

The interviews were conducted in Creole according to a pre-prepared schedule, the mother tongue in which the children could express themselves as they could not do so either in English or French. Each interview lasted for nearly 45 minutes to 1 hour, and each participant went through a set of two interviews, except Manuel who had a single longer interview.

3.5.2.1 *Transferring into text: Transcription*

The next step was to transcribe the audio data to textual data. In order not to lose the essence of the information conveyed, transcription was done from audio to text in Creole, as the interviews were held in Creole. However, Creole is mostly a spoken language and its writing can take various forms because the ways it is spoken in different regions and by different class of the Inland is different. I have opted to use Grafi-Larmoni, a harmonised standardised way of writing the Mauritian Creole Language (MCL) (Hookoomsing, 2004). This was a tedious and challenging task and I first translated each interview in Creole. I listened to the interview line-by-line and wrote the text. I used a media-player so that I could stop/start/rewind anytime I wanted. Then each text in Creole was translated literally in English, which I call transliteration (see Appendix 7). This is done in order to get the essence of the source language, i.e. get the meaning of what was being said. The transliterated version was then written in English, which conveyed the idea rather than the spoken words.

3.5.3 Document collection

For the purpose of analysis, several documents had to be collected that would be useful in due time. These documents are:

Education for All 2015 National Review. This document reviews the challenges since the year 2000 with recommended targets for the year 2015 in the quest for Mauritius to meet the EFA goals. It informs us that Mauritius has moved from a sugar-crop economy and is now targeting on the development of the country as a service-hub of the region. As such, Mauritius, according to this document, shows that the country has a high human development index. This means that the lifespan of the population, the education level and the GDP per capita (having a high standard of living) are higher (UNDP, 2015). According to the EFA report, Mauritius is now capable of meeting the MDGs and EFA goals in 2015. Despite all these praises, what has gone wrong? One of the objectives of

the EFA as proposed by the Education and Human Resources Strategic Plan (EHRSP) 2008-2020 was to “ensure that all students are given the opportunity to embark on and complete higher secondary education for employability and higher and further education and training with the required maturity and confidence” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 3). Despite all the praises, such an objective has not been reached and children are dropping out before reaching secondary schools.

The budget speech 2015-2016 as reported by the Board of Investment, 2015: this document provides information about the “smart cities”, the latest measures increasing the process of gentrification. This document shows how facilities are being offered to foreigners to become residents of Mauritius. This, of course, allows foreign currency to enter the Mauritian economy and accelerates the process of gentrification. All the prized lands are becoming IRSs, or smart cities, while the peripheries become suburban areas. This document empowers the Board of Investment (the budget speech 2015-2016):

The Board of Investment is entrusted with the posting of trade and investment managers in eight strategic cities around the world. BOI will also manage the ambitious reverse brain drain scheme for our professionals of the Mauritian diaspora. Furthermore, the Investment Promotion Act is being amended to give extended powers to the fast-track committee - particularly regarding EIA, morcellement, building and land use, and land conversion permits - with the BOI providing support to public bodies on the review of systems, procedures and guidelines in the context of ease of doing business. Board of Investment (BOI, 2015, p. 1).

The report goes further in defining IRS:

A project under the new scheme must be an integrated and inclusive development that does not favour gated communities. The project must include in addition to a mix of residential units, amenities/facilities like medical centres, schools, kindergartens, homes for seniors, wellness centres, restaurants, small shops and leisure facilities that would attract the community at large within the development (BOI, 2015, p. 12).

Thus, resorts are being built within a city, with their own schools etc. For whom will these schools and other facilities be?

The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality Report, 2007, (SACMEQ III National Report), a project that provides information about the schooling system and about the different education reforms since 1984 in Mauritius. This report also gives information about a series of new measures introduced since 2006. One of these is the language of instruction. When asked how many children spoke the language of instruction at home, a few said always, most of them once in a while and quite a huge number never spoke the language of instruction at home. SACMEQ goes further in that there is a strong correlation between those who speak the language of instruction at home and success in the 6th Grade. The document furnishes useful statistics on socioeconomic background, number of meals per day etc. These statistics could be used during the analysis stage.

SECTION D

3.6 Analysis

This section describes the different phases of analysis I used in my study. The idea is to make the most of the data collected from the participant and to represent same in a coherent and meaningful way (Hunter, 2010). In this section, I will describe the different phases of data analysis I undertook. This stage comprised 3 levels of analysis, which are familiarising with and preparing the data at level one, emergence of thematic issues at level two and the analysis of non-matching data at level three.

3.6.1 Data analysis 1

In this section, I explain how data collected have been prepared and transcribed into narratives.

3.6.1.1 *Familiarising with the data*

The main data of this study emanated from the interviews of the participants. After each interview, data was transcribed as explained above (3.5.2.1). The purpose of this first level of the analysis is to co-construct narratives from the rich, thick data set that has been collected. Hence I chose the inductive data analysis as opposed to deductive data analysis, whose purpose is more for testing assumptions and hypotheses (Thomas,

2006). I coded the data set in order to get a more manageable data from which I could get insight.

3.6.1.2 *Preparing the data*

After the interview of each participant, I proceeded to transfer the audio version in text version in the child's own language, Creole. There was no other option other than using the Creole language as the participants were children who were mostly illiterate and the only way they could express themselves was through their mother tongue. This was a meticulous but fascinating task as Creole orthography is quite new and I needed to learn to write in the official Creole version. The Creole texts of the interview were then transliterated. However, I am also conscious that metaphors used by the participants in their mother tongue are not easily translatable. I have tried as far as possible not to insert the original words in Creole in the transliterated version but I have kept as nearly as possible a word-for-word translation. While translating from Creole to English, I have tried as far as possible to keep the meaning with all fidelity. For example, below is a transliteration and translation of the transliterated text of an answer from Pravin.

P. gagn enn bon travay...travay bien...aranz mo lakaz...enn zoli tran-sink dan mo lakaz...fini marye tou

Transliterated: get a good job...work well...build my house...my beautiful dame in my house...already married too.

The term “tran-sink” in Mauritian Creole means “thirty five”. Literally it also means “girl-friend”, a meaning that has been conveyed here.

For the purpose of interpretation for International readers, the text has been translated thus:

P. Build my house meanwhile, work and build. Then I will search for a girl, a good girl. I will work and work till I get married.

Van Nes, Abma Jonsson and Deeg (2010, p. 314) advocate that translating experiences to words is quite complicated as experiences are difficult to be expressed in language. Participants then try to express themselves in narratives or metaphors, which vary from culture to culture. According to them, “translation between languages involves interpretation” and it is the task of the translator to interpret and transfer into a language (here English, for International readers) so that the reader understands the message being conveyed.

3.6.1.3 *Transcription and writing the narratives*

After transliteration, the interview was re-written in a text which was more understandable by a multinational English speaking audience (see Appendix 8). Here due to cultural differences, both the participants and I were not using the same type of spoken Creole to converse. My Creole was more of an urban type with a “touch of French” whereas the participants’ Creole was more of the village and sub-urban version of youth speaking.

An example is given in the text box below.

L. mo kontan kan li koz sa mwa...mo rakont mo problem...mo rakont li tou...ena de fwa li fer nou desine...ekrir nou bann problem...selma ena de fwa li asize ...li koze ...li res koze...si li pe explik en dewar la...ayo ...li pou fer sa vinn enn ron...li pou koumans dei dan bout...li vinn par isis...li pou al al par laba...ayo...mo gayn la raz.../

L.(transliterated) I like when he talks about those things...i will tell my problems...i will tell everything...sometimes he will get us to draw...or write down our problems...but at times he will sit down...he will talk...he keeps on talking...he will start by a round...he will start from one end...h will go this way...that way...i get fed up

When transcribed:

L. I like when he talks about those things **[our problems]**. I don't hesitate to talk about my problems. I will tell everything, sometimes he will get us to express our problems in a drawing or in writing, but at times he will enter into a conversation

So, after transcribing the text I proceeded to writing the narratives.

I started writing the narrative for Pravin as it was the first interview that I conducted. The first example was more of a reporting rather than a narrated story. I went back to my literature and went through the process of re-understanding the narrative inquiry paradigm and writing the narrative with respect to my CQs. I found out that my interviews produced more facts rather than experiences, and therefore I went back to Pravin to collect more of his experiences that he had lived at home and during school time. I could not repeat the same process for Manuel as his interview was more complex as he was on the point of leaving the centre. I could not meet him afterwards to co-construct his narrative because he was at the Correctional Youth Centre (CYC). But I did get a lot of information through documents available at Morning-Star in order to write his narrative.

It was more difficult to construct Byron's narrative as his interview was somewhat blurred as he stammers. Furthermore, his experiences were not clearly expressed. I had to re-work on specific points with him so that I could get more of his feelings on events of his life. Since he had left the Knowledge Hub of Morning-Star, I had to wait for an

occasion when he was not working to supplement his experiences, especially the blurred parts of his interview. But at the same time I noticed that my interviews were not producing a lot of the participants' experiences, thus the need to meet them again. I felt that my interviews were more of a question/answer process, whereas Atkinson (2002, p. 254) claims that "in trying to understand other persons' experiences in life or their relations to others, to let their voices be heard, to let them speak for and about themselves first". This, I believe, was due to my lack of experience in the field of narrative inquiry and I kept going back several times to the literature to get a better understanding of the paradigm I was working in. With all these experiences gathered from the interviews and narrative writing of Pravin, Manuel and Byron, I allowed myself more freedom during the interview of Ludivin. I allowed the experiences to flow literally, i.e I allowed her more time to express her feelings by using expressions such as 'mmmhh' or 'huhh', so that she took it as a clue to pursue her idea. And I did obtain rich thick data that facilitated my writing of the narrative of Ludivin.

Writing the narratives brought back memories of my childhood and my own experiences of schooling while living in a familial environment that was more than stable. This has helped me to construct the narratives, to explore, inform, illuminate and to help provide insight to the phenomena (Samuel, 2015).

The process of writing the narratives allowed me to put in in-depth rigour to obtain good quality raw data and reconstructed narrative records from the transcripts and other data available. It was thus a recursive process which was time-consuming but the end product was satisfying. Furthermore, there was a constant movement to and fro between the participants and myself, whenever it was possible, depending on the availability of the participants. There was also a constant movement to and from the supervisors, editors and myself. This process took me about six months to achieve. At the same time, as themes started emerging, there was a constant mental work and re-work and so further literature had to be drafted in for a better understanding of the phenomenon. Finally I was able to present a draft summary of the narratives to Pravin and Ludivin, but not to Manuel as he was in CYC and Byron who could no longer be contacted.

3.6.2 Data analysis 2: Thematic analysis

Once I completed all the narratives, I proceeded to go to the next level of analysis which was the analysis of the narratives. During the reporting about the analysis processes the following terms will be used and which need some explanation. A 'code' is the label attached to a phrase or other short sequence of the text being analysed. In this study, 'grandmother helping children' and 'fathers at work' are examples of codes. A 'category' is a superordinate grouping used for a coded segment in order to abstract the lower level codes: e.g., 'people helping out of school children'. A 'theme' is a higher level of categorisation, usually used to identify a major element: e.g., 'life with the significant ones' and 'experiences with peers'.

A 'case' is the unit of analysis which is any bounded unit e.g family intervention is a case of analysis. Each participant is not a case but each theme that emerged (e.g peer group influence, patriarchy e.t.c) became a case.

I read the transcripts repeatedly in order to become completely familiar with the data. I highlighted a few words, phrases or sentences that described specific phenomenon. This became for me a meaningful unit which was given a name (coded). Then these meaningful units were grouped in categories. Themes emerged from the codes and categories eventually. For example, interaction with the grandmother, the purpose of the grandmother in the life of the children, the position and hierarchy of the grandmother in the family allowed the theme influence of the patriarch to emerge. In chapter 5, each theme that emerged were cross-analysed for the different participants, e.g. what was the influence of the patriarch in the life of the four participants?

A thematic analysis was done. Braun and Clark, (2006, p. 6) define thematic analysis as "a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data." By using an inductive approach, I allowed the themes to emerge from the data. Braun and Clark (2006) explain that the themes are strongly linked to the data and are not linked to any existing theory. However, themes do not emerge from a vacuum but there are theoretical predilections that guide the search for themes, (Mc Adams, 2012). The themes that emerged, based on my research questions, were reassessed to see if some of them could be merged, thus limiting the number so that they matched the evaluation objectives. The themes that emerged based on my critical questions were the out-of-

school experiences, the in-school experiences and the self-experiences of the participants. These themes helped to develop an understanding of the process of dropping out, based on the life-experiences of the participants.

3.6.3 Data analysis 3: In dialogue with the literature review and theoretical framework

Based on the themes that emerged in the previous chapter, the different influences that stood out from the cross-case analysis were identified. An in-depth analysis of the novelties, differences and the surprising issues was done in order to answer the third research critical question in order to find out why do the life-experiences of the children in the out-of-school, in-school and their self-experiences influence dropping out of children in the Mauritian context in the way they do.

SECTION E

3.7 Rigour, validity and ethics

3.7.1 Ensuring trustworthiness

In representing the stories, I needed to take into consideration issues of trustworthiness, rigour and believability. Shenton (2003, p. 63) mentions that positivists very often question the trustworthiness of qualitative research “because their concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way in naturalistic work”. However, several researchers have shown how such measures can be integrated in qualitative research although the terminologies vary. In order to ensure trustworthiness in my study, I used the constructs prescribed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) which are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

3.7.1.1 *Ensuring credibility*

In order to ensure the credibility of the research, I used what Lincoln and Guba call member checking. This was an important process as it provided more credibility to my study. I was able to have at least one member-check with each participant before some of them became unavailable. Manuel was sent to the Rehabilitation Youth Centre (RYC) after he left Morning-Star but I was able to discuss with him the interpretations I gave to his interview. The same process was done with Ludivin and Byron before they left the

SENS School. However, I was able to meet Pravin more often during my visits to the NGO and I was even able to discuss the conclusions with him. I read a summary of the narratives to the participants as they were all nearly or completely illiterate. Though I planned to involve the social worker for this exercise, I became more reluctant to do so due to the confidentiality of the information they provided, both on their lives and also about the NGO itself.

I also had a peer review done where various discussions were held to ensure that I was giving the right meaning to the data rather than simply determining if these events happened.

3.7.1.2 *Ensuring transferability*

In this chapter, I have given ample details about the field-work and also about the need to enter the field well in advance in order to become acquainted with the field and the participants, especially when dealing with vulnerable children. A detailed account of the field-work and an account of the location of the site has been given whilst keeping anonymity of the research context.

3.7.1.3 *Ensuring dependability*

In this study, data obtained was transcribed in the original language - the Creole language. Each interview was coded with the pseudonym of the participant, interview number, date recorded. The Creole texts were then transcribed literally in English in order to keep the essence of the participants' experiences. Then a full transcription in English was made.

All profile data were also corroborated with the social worker of the NGO.

3.7.1.4 *Ensuring confirmability*

I kept a reflexive journal from the time I entered the field where I kept track of my observations, feelings, hunches, all my experiences, thoughts and opinions were recorded. This was used in writing up the research. This also helped me to increase my insight into the phenomena.

3.7.2 Ethical issues

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 51) advocate that at each stage in the sequence of doing research, an ethical issue will arise. It may arise in the “nature of the research itself, in the context of the research, in the procedures to be adopted, in the methods of data collection, in the nature of the participants, in the type of data collected, and in what to be done with the data”.

3.7.2.1 *Pre-field access*

3.7.2.1.1 *Gate-keeper’s consent*

Before starting the research, I needed to contact Morning-Star NGO where children who had dropped out from formal schooling were following informal classes. I sent a letter to the Director of Morning-Star, seeking his consent for me to get access to the children of the institution. I stressed the following procedures:

I need to have an acquaintance period where I would teach ICT to the children in order to be accepted by them and so that they get used to my presence. No data observed or obtained during this period would be used for the research.

On obtaining my ethical clearance from the Ethical Board of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, I proceeded, with his help, in accessing the fact-files of the children, by getting a sample of children who would fit the purpose of my research.

I informed the director that I would give a consent letter to the children being chosen as sample, informing them of their right to leave if they were not keen to continue. Consent forms were sent to the parents through the social worker and/or the care-givers. Once I received the parents’/care-givers’ consent, I proceeded to get the consent of the sampled children. The children chose the interview environment that would usually be neutral ground. I mentioned that ‘Jardin D’Eveil’ would be an ideal place. The purpose was to prevent power-related issues. I also informed the director that I would need his help as well as the help of the social worker and psychologist in case there was a need to intervene if children were stressed during the event of the interview. I made him aware that all related documents/ tapes/ transcription would be

destroyed at the end of the research and I would appreciate his presence at that moment. I was granted consent by the director.

3.7.2.1.2 *Negotiating access*

During my acquaintance period, I approached the potential participants that could be part of my study and I revealed the purpose of my presence and the aims, nature and the procedures of my study. At the onset, I did not want the potential participants to feel deceived if such information was revealed at a later stage. During my stay with them, I was able to observe them in the world that they were experiencing their schooling after dropping out. Some participants readily accepted my proposition.

3.7.2.1.3 *Parents'/care-givers' consent*

After having selected my sample, I proceeded, with the help of the social worker and the psychologist who were more in proximity with the parents/care-givers to obtain their consent while at the same time informing them of the purpose of my research. I invited the parents/care-givers to consent that their child/ward be selected as participant. I gave the modalities of the interviews (two per participant) and that the interviews will be audio-taped and to get their consent for this. I also informed them the participant had the right to comply or refuse and that I would preserve the real identity of the participant and use pseudonyms for all the places or people mentioned in the interview. The parents/care-givers were informed that the participant could withdraw from the study at any time he/she wanted and his/her data would not be used. I ensured that the parents/care-givers were aware that all data recordings and transcripts would be kept confidentially in a locked cabinet, that no harm would be done to the participant and that I had already obtained the help of a social worker and a psychologist if the participant was stressed at any time. The parents/care-givers were informed that the participant could ask not to publish any part of the interview or observation and that the key points of the narratives would be read to the participants to obtain their approval.

3.7.2.1.4 *Participants' consent*

Once the parents/care-givers consent was obtained, I proceeded to obtain the participants' consent. I gave them a consent form which contained the following information that I read to them in the presence of the social-worker.

I explained to them the purpose of my research. I gave the modalities of the interviews (one hour for each interview; there would be two interviews) and that the interviews will be audio-taped and to get their consent for same. I also informed them that, he/she, as participant, had the right to comply or refuse that I would preserve their real identity and use pseudonyms that they have chosen themselves and that all the places or people mentioned in the interview will be anonymised.

I informed the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time they wanted and that their data would not be shared. All data recordings and transcripts would be kept confidentially in a locked cabinet, no harm would be done to them and I had already obtained the help of a social worker and a psychologist if they felt stressed at any time. Furthermore I informed the participants that they could ask for any part of the interview or observation not to be published and that the key points of the narratives would be read to them to obtain their approval.

3.7.2.2 *In-field ethical issues*

All throughout the interviews, I tried to put the participants at ease, and each interview was conducted according to their free time and voluntarily. When the participants felt that they were ready to share their experiences, I took them out of the institution to the "Jardin D'Eveil" (see 3.4.4). There were times during the interview when the participants recalled painful memories and I gave them time and space to decide whether they wished to continue sharing their experiences. Furthermore, I have tried to abstain as far as possible not to judge my participants' experiences that they were shared with me. At no time did I allow the participants to feel bad or humiliated about their actions, as even after the interviews, I was always there to share their company, especially in difficult moments, such as the death of Pravin's grandmother or a visit to Manuel in CYC after he left Morning-Star NGO. At some point in time I think that I became attached to my participants, because of the life that they experienced which reminded me of my own experiences.

3.7.2.3 *Post field-work ethical issues*

During the transcription and writing of the narratives, I have kept in mind the participants' rights to privacy. Though I mentioned in my application for ethical clearance that I would share the key points of the narratives with my participants in the presence of the Director, I was not able to do. This is because the participants had shared valuable information about the NGO and it was my duty to keep such information private. Furthermore, anonymity was kept all throughout the writing of the narratives.

3.8 Chapter synthesis

This chapter has presented the different aspects into the methodology used for the study. It is based on the epistemological issue that truth is constructed with the help of my participants. Careful attention has been given to the preparation to enter the field, taking into consideration the vulnerability nature of the participants. Furthermore, I have also provided all the different ethical issues that were taken from the beginning of the study to the production of the report. Though the sample is not the same in the different cases, there are patterns that emerge and converge towards the different themes, thus giving an insight into the experiences of OOSC. The next chapter will provide more insight in taking into consideration the data from the participants and told as narratives.

PART 2

Part 2 comprises two chapters, Chapter 4 and 5, namely the narratives of the four participants and the cross-case analysis. In the first chapter, the co-constructed narratives are storied in such a way that the first two narratives are from the participants who have ended up in the Morning Star shelter after having lived in their families. The narratives of Byron and Ludivin follow, both having joined Morning Star knowledge hub and staying with their parents.. In the chapter 5 the narratives were analysed where three main constructs emerged, namely out-of-school experiences, in-school experiences and self-experiences of the participants.

CHAPTER 4

THE PARTICIPANTS' NARRATIVES

4.1 Overview

After having been with the participants for nearly one-and-a-half years and after having translated and transcribed the interviews, the most difficult task that I had was to be faithful to the participants' stories while relating their stories. Each narrative relates the life story of each participant, which they have wilfully conveyed and revealed to me and I felt honoured to reproduce their stories and experiences.

4.2 Orientation to Chapter 4

In this chapter, I narrate the tales of my participants, namely Manuel, Pravin, Byron and Ludivin. I have started with Manuel because his story depicts how the sheer determination of a child with various separations in his life, could persevere in his schooling until he reaches satisfaction. This was followed by Pravin's narrative, who also strove hard but the events of life were too hard to bear. He still hopes of a better future. I thought of having Manuel's and Pravin's narrative in one section as they both ended in a shelter even though they previously lived with their families, but I abstained from doing it and therefore, Manuel's and Pravin's narratives are followed by Byron's and Ludivin's narratives. Byron and Ludivin both lived with their families until the data production. Byron is the third narrative I chose, as he is the one who is most disillusioned in life and his narrative shows how the schooling experiences have affected him. Finally, I chose to put Ludivin as the last narrative as it gives an insight into the life of many children who are victims of oppression, both at home and in school.

4.3 The narratives of out-of-school children

4.3.1 Manuel: The Knock-Out of a Boxer

4.3.1.1 *I did not choose my family*

Moving house was a repeated occurrence for 16-year-old Manuel and his family. Harold and Christiane, Manuel's parents, originally from Pink-Bell, later moved to Pleasure-Land to stay with Manuel's dad's brother, Kevin. Three years later they moved to Star-Fruit into a house that belonged to Manuel's paternal grandfather. It was in Star-Fruit that Manuel's sister, Cynthia,⁶ was born. Manuel was five years older than Cynthia. When Manuel was 10, they moved to stay with their paternal grandmother, Pearl, at Rose-Mountain, for two years before he was sent to Morning-Star Shelter.

Manuel first experienced early childhood schooling at the age of four. Unlike most children going to pre-primary, he was quite jovial and liked the environment he was in. *"While many others were crying and searching for their parents, I did not cry,"* he explained, *"that was because I was mischievous. When the girls had finished preparing their doll house, I went and broke them and then came to sit down as if nothing had happened."*⁷ No one dared complain as he was well-built for his age and the tiny tots were all scared of him. At five years, he joined Grade 1 in the same school. Unfortunately, this coincided with a very dreadful occurrence that may have marked his life for good.

Manuel's family life has not been easy. His father, a security guard, had been in and out of prison on several occasions. Just before Manuel was born, his father was in prison. When Manuel was seven his father was again imprisoned. Harold's absence from the family spanned five years. *"I was rarely with my parents when I grew up as they did not have time to care for me, I did not choose my family,"* Manuel lamented.

⁶All names of persons and places are pseudonyms.

⁷All italicised insertions relate directly to the spoken words of the participants in the data production process.

His mother, Christiane, who worked as a croupier at Bambi Casino, lived with her husband until Manuel was 10 years old. When her husband was imprisoned for the second time, she walked out of the family house, choosing to start an independent new life. It was after this separation that Manuel and Cynthia left Star-Fruit to stay with their grandmother. Cynthia was the apple of Manuel's eye, but he never showed her much attention or affection. *"I did not allow myself to get too close to her since I knew that if we were separated, then it would affect her too much."* Manuel painfully saw how his own parents' separation could take its toll.

His grandmother's house at Rose-Mountain seemed to be a place of refuge for separated children, step-children from his family's broken homes. His younger cousin, Drian, also came to stay in their grandmother's home because his aunt, according to Manuel, was seen as *"mad"*. Cynthia was his blood sister, but Manuel soon became aware that he had many other step-brothers and sisters. After she left them, his mother had another girl. That was the excuse she gave to explain why she did not have enough time to visit or support Cynthia and him. Manuel recently learnt that his father had two children before his relationship with his mother. His nineteen-year-old step-brother and a step-sister now live in France.

His extended family of uncles was not any better than his own dad. Manuel reported regrettably that the police considered his uncle, Kevin, as a drug trafficker. When the police came after his uncle, this sparked off another move from Manuel's family home. They shifted temporarily to Kevin's secondary home in Bromwich-West where Manuel enjoyed the sun and sea of the beach. Unfortunately, after the death of his uncle, who was battered to death in prison, the whole Bromwich-West place was abandoned. This was when Manuel was only 5 years old, just starting primary schooling. When the body of Kevin was delivered by the police to Pleasure-Land, Manuel saw the pain and rage on his father's face. A year later, Dean, the eldest brother of Harold, was also arrested for drug trafficking and jailed for 32 years. Immediately after, in 2007, Harold was again arrested and sent to prison. Manuel was baffled. For a kid of seven years, there were just too many things happening within a short period. Manuel felt the burden of his family's reputation, the eyes of society upon him, expecting him too to be like his father and uncles. *"I did not choose my family,"* Manuel lamented again, thinking that society's eyes judged him unjustly.

4.3.1.2 Schooling experiences: Seventeen Units at CPE.

Looking back at school life, he realised that it was a blessing. Home life was boring, stuck between a father who was attending to his job and Christiane who was also working, both on night duties. He was spending most of his time between Pearl and Tony, the paternal grandfather. School life gave him the opportunity to express himself and to socialise with other kids. He liked school as it was a place where he could do his mischief and show his power. He played on the notoriety of his parents and grandparents to reach a position of leader in school.

Primary schooling was a little harder than pre-primary. Learners were of all ages, from five to 12, and as any new entrant, he went through the quirkiness of the older children. But that was not a problem for him. He watched them doing all their tricks and then, bang! He retaliated. He had been initiated to boxing at an early age, and as he was stoutly built, he retaliated to their bullying promptly. He was not going to be their punching ball; they had to respect him. Anyway, he had a reputation to keep, being the son and grandson of the Bonds, the family name. No one else ever bullied him again till he left. First, second and third standards were fun and he played the fool a lot with his friends. After all the tantrums on the playing fields and in the classroom, no wonder he was punished. But he did not care. He was not scared of punishment, even if it meant removing his shorts and walking in the school yard, because anyway he was a boy and he wore long shirts to cover himself. There was no need for a “MAN” to be ashamed.

Whenever he knew that his father would be coming to school, Manuel peeped through the windows anxiously, because he knew his father could bring him some sweets. But his father never really thought about creating this bond with him. Manuel was scared when his father was summoned by the headmistress. Thankfully, he knew that his father did not bother too much about the value of education anyway, as he himself was uneducated. So, his misdemeanours at school would likely be ignored by his father.

When Harold went to prison, Christiane took control of his education. In fourth, fifth and sixth standards Manuel dedicated himself to studies. *“Every afternoon, I would peep through my household’s bamboo fence to see if Christiane was waiting with her gas hose-pipe. I never went home directly from school as I hanged around with my friends.”* Christiane was very strict and if he was late, he would get beaten. His progress and

marks had better be good otherwise he would again get beaten with the gas hose. He could not depend on Pearl for help for she too would help in beating him. Christiane had studied up to her Cambridge School Certificate and she knew about the importance of studies. But then, Christiane left to start a new life when Manuel was in Standard V and Pearl had to take over. It was most probably because she was not entitled to receive convict's allowance while the children were. When Manuel moved to Pearl's place, his friends and teachers helped him. *"I always had people around me to help me in my studies. I had my mother, my rich school friends and the teachers who were all helping me as they were convinced that I had the potential to succeed,"* he declared. Luckily for him, the school was a non-ZEP⁸ school and so the school population was quite heterogeneous. And then fate stepped in. Pearl died and he could not save her, though he was with her. His whole world collapsed. Overnight he became a vagabond. *"I was disgusted with life. All the people I loved had disappeared from my life. That was why I kept away from Cynthia. What was the purpose of studying now?"* he lamented. He went to school only to tattoo his friends for fun. He considered himself as a jack of all trades. *"My friends had told me that if I wanted to succeed in the CPE examination I had to pass in English, French and Mathematics. It was too hard for me after the death of my grandmother. There was too much to study."* Though he sat for the CPE, he rebelled by not writing anything on the answer script, except his name. He refused to study and as a result he was UNGRADED.

Manuel, nevertheless, decided to repeat but meanwhile all his rich friends had left. Some went to New Bouldon* College, others at St Jesus* College, Baden* College, even at Loyola* College. They all regretted that he was not with them. Despite the vagabonds in his repeaters' class, Manuel put in a lot of effort to succeed. But then, how do you beat the odds, when you have never watched English films, never listened to English news, when you have slept during the English tutorials? *"It was impossible for me to succeed in English, though I used to succeed in all the other CPE papers. When the results came out, I was surprised that I obtained 17 units. That meant that I had succeeded in all six examination papers,"* he exclaimed, surprised. He obtained

⁸ A non-ZEP school is a school whose percentage of failures at the CPE is lower than 40% spanning over the preceding three years

admission to the normal stream of St Spiritan's College, one of the best secondary schools on the island. That was great news. He was not a failure after all. Others who failed joined the prevocational sector⁹. He asked Jordan, his youth leader at the shelter, to make sure he got his school uniform on time. But he was disillusioned when he was informed that he would have to attend non-formal education because the manager of the shelter decided that Manuel had too much of a bad temperament to be sent to college. Instead he was kept in a non-formal school at Morning-Star Knowledge Hub. Manuel was heartbroken. *"What were all these efforts for? Had I known I would not have wasted my time,"* he said in disgust.

4.3.1.3 Separations

Reflecting on his constricted life within the Morning-Star Shelter, Manuel longed for his day of independence. *"Sometimes I imagine when we will be 18, we will all go on our way. But it is not easy. It will be difficult for us. It's tragic."* Now at 16, Manuel looked back on all the separations in his life, culminating with the most tragic blow of 2009. *"I knew that all the separations that I have had in my life would have an effect on me and my behaviour. When I was one year old, I saw stoutly built Uncle Kevin surrounded by policemen, handcuffed and taken to prison,"* he started recounting. Kevin was on the verge of being freed from prison in January 2006, when he was killed by fellow prisoners in July 2005. *"When I was five years old I saw the dead corpse of Uncle Kevin as it was ushered in the house at Pleasure-Land, the body already in a coffin due to the battering and deep lacerations on his body. I had just joined primary school at that time,"* he continued. *"Then in 2006, it was the turn of chubby and bald-headed Uncle Dean to be accused of drug trafficking and condemned to 32 years of imprisonment. In 2007, it was the turn of my father to be accused of robbery, violence and drug consumption and imprisoned for five years."*

⁹At the end of the Certificate of Primary Education, children who are successful are channelled through the normal stream education system while those who fail are channelled through the prevocational sector. Both sets of children attend the same secondary school but with a different curriculum that will allow the prevocational stream after four years to join the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD) to pursue a vocational training or to leave and join the work force.

After those three separations, Manuel's mother left in 2009, when he was 10 years old. Manuel was in Grade 5, an important moment for schooling and the year after he was to sit for his Primary School Leaving examination. Despite all the sudden departures of those he cared for, he remained stoic in school, keeping in line with his studies. That was because he was well supported by his friends and his teachers. The only solace of Manuel and his sister was the grandmother who readily accepted to provide the children with all the love, affection and support that the other adults could not provide.

"As I got up in the morning, while frail Cynthia was still lazing in bed, I could smell the nice flavour of a vanilla tea and powdered milk from my grandmother's tiny kitchen. She had some loaves of bread split open on the table, pasted with 'Flora butter' and peanut butter. I heard my grandmother humming her favourite song, 'Blowing in the wind'. She was up early in the morning to prepare our lunch-box and breakfast," he recalled. As she heard Manuel approaching, she started to crack her jokes and laughed happily. Manuel still has sweet souvenirs of those moments. *"Every day, every morning, when my grandmother prepared our lunch-box, there was always a 'good morning'",* he reminisced. *"There was always laughter all day long",* he recalled. Pearl, despite her own sorrows, managed to smile broadly for her children's sake. Having the care of the children was as if a daily gift. She would take the kids to church on Sundays; and at times take them to the seaside. She wanted them to enjoy a normal family life. Children must have fun, she believed. As long as he felt comfortable in this family support, Manuel was able to endure the bitterness of life.

Then another separation hit, the most drastic one. One morning when everyone in the homestead had gone off to work, Pearl, who was in her late 70s or early 80s suffered a massive heart attack. Manuel was the only one within the household. He felt helpless and bewildered as any 11-year-old would. There was no one around to help transport Pearl to the hospital. Eventually he ran to neighbour's house. The lady telephoned to the police to call an ambulance. But they had to wait for the ambulance for a long time. His grandmother, the laughing spirit of his life, died while she was being transported to hospital, while Manuel watched tearfully. Manuel and Cynthia were in total shock. Their only solace had disappeared, just like that. All of a sudden, all hope was gone. *"It is my greatest wish that my grandmother could still be here,"* Manuel reflected thinking back about the happy times with his happy grandmother. Another separation followed:

Cynthia was sent away to stay with her mother. But Manuel refused to leave his grandmother's home and refused to live with his mother's concubine. *"I wanted to stay at my grandmother's place, but I also wanted to run away from it all. There was no point staying there as there was no one to come back to. I would no longer hear my grandmother singing in the morning or to get the smell of tea."* Manuel was then doing his CPE.

4.3.1.4 *Birds of a feather*

Manuel was suddenly thrust, at 11 years old, into the adult world. With all his immediate support gone, how was he to survive? As a young kid, he derived a lot of pleasure, fun and mischief with his childhood friends. That was where his comfort would come, he thought. But life had a way of disrupting his boyish dreams. One day swimming in the muddy and tricky waters of Blackwood, he noticed a lady trying to follow them to cross over the river. Mischievously, his friends and he stood on a stone in the river to make her believe that the water where they were standing was shallow. She foolishly followed their misdirection and ventured into the deep waters. Suddenly his friend and he noticed her starting to sink. Perhaps she was drunk they laughingly remarked, or perhaps she was truly drowning. Manuel dived in to save her and together with his friends, they were able to pull her back to the bank of the river. That was a lucky escape. The police soon prohibited swimming in this river. Manuel realised that this could have meant serious trouble if the woman had reported them.

However, for Manuel and friends, defying the authorities was part of the thrill of being young. It was the most common and exciting thing after each mischief to see the police running behind them as they dashed off into hiding in the nearby sugar cane fields. The children staying near his grandfather's house were mainly school mates. The sugarcane fields surrounding the house were their hideout. Manuel wondered why he could not make friends with the regular school boys in the environment where he was living. Did other children reject him because of his notorious family? He was generally popular at school, and his circle of friends included different children irrespective of his colour, creed, race, socioeconomic situation.

Axcel, one of his favourite friends, was staying with his family in the police quarters flat. His father was a policeman. He remembered Axcel's father's praise, *"You will*

make a good policeman, Manuel, my son. You have the physique and the guts for the job." It was extraordinary for Manuel to receive such positive compliments. He was indeed happy. These rich friends helped him a lot. They even encouraged him to pursue his studies. *"In class, whenever I was tempted to play the fool, my friends would ask the disturbers to shut up and to allow the teacher to proceed. As such, I also needed to follow the class."* Sometimes when he misbehaved in class, the teachers always scolded him and asked him to leave the class but his rich friends intervened in his favour so that that he could integrate the class. When his grandmother was sick, the friends stuck by him and he thought that whatever happened, they would be together for some time. Even the teachers helped him by giving him free tuitions, as his friends were already taking tuitions from the same teachers. But Manuel did not manage to keep abreast of their successes. They all soon left him too, to go to college. *"This was because they were rich and intelligent,"* he concluded. *"They did not have to study to succeed. I also could have made it to college, but unfortunately my grandmother died."* Over time, Manuel lost interest in the repeaters class. By then, Manuel was staying at the grandmother's place and he met his childhood friends more. He did make an effort to study, but he was left with all the *"vagabonds and backbenchers"*, while all his true and helpful friends had moved on. His new classmates were not like the friends who were attending different schools. They could not even read or write and they played the fool the whole day.

After Pearl died, all members of his blood family from that household dispersed. *"What was the purpose of going back to the house where there were such a lot of memories in the air?"* He walked aimlessly the streets of Rose-Mountain, and that was where he met Willy and Arnold sitting on the steps of the church. He sat down with them and he happened to learn that their life was no different from his. They were alone; their fathers were dead; their mothers fleeting in and out of their lives occasionally. It was now time to earn their living. Manuel realised that he often visited Arnold and Willy in their *"flat"*. They laughed, chatted and shared their feelings. But Manuel knew that the suspicious neighbours were watching closely as three kids living alone in a flat was bound to arouse suspicion. When the Child Development Unit landed there, Willy and he were caught while Arnold managed to escape. The law did not allow children to live on their own without the presence of any adult. With no family members to support him,

Manuel was sent to Morning-Star Shelter. He was on the point of finishing his CPE repeater class.

At Morning-Star, life was not easy. Manuel had to pass through several stages of initiation before being admitted in a new group of friends consisting of Mevin, Denis and Pravin. Once accepted, he waited patiently for his turn to take leadership of the group of friends after the departure of Mevin. This in-house club regulated the comings and goings of its members and the boss imposed his authority through the club's own internal rules. The "*club*" had its own greeting codes, slang, symbols. Being a member involved mainly providing "*protection*". No outsider could infiltrate this band of fellows. No one from outside dared to harm one of the gang. These boys soon moved out of the shelter and started their own lives. These friends, Willy, Arnold and their wives; Denis and Pravin are those that Manuel still holds close to his heart. Through all their hardships of life, they were always there helping one another. "*And now what will happen when I leave Morning-Star? Maybe,*" he thought, "*I can rent a house and ask all my friends to come and stay with me?*"

4.3.1.5 *My dream: from professional boxer to leader.*

Every child, at one point or another has a dream in life. Built like an athlete, Manuel dreamt of becoming a "professional boxer". How wonderful it would be to emulate Rikard Sun, the first Mauritian boxer to win a Commonwealth gold medal in 1998. By the time he joined primary school, he had already gone through a boxing centre in Star-Fruit and was well on his way to fulfil his dreams. But he soon discovered that being a boxer had other advantages. He could assert his authority on the playing field by beating up the bullies one by one. He was so proud of his strength. They were all scared of him, even those vagabond repeaters. He thrived on the respect he obtained. He knew they saw him as the leader. Being punished for using such brute force, was not a big issue. "*When you defy authority, you gain others' respect,*" he thought. Manuel learnt that his boxing abilities, coupled with his father's and grandfather's reputation would help him survive in due time.

Poor Remi suffered a lot from him, always either in or out of the dirt-bin in school. Remi became his favourite whipping-boy. Manuel remembered him fondly since he also liked to listen to Remi playing the guitar. But being a leader also meant that you will be

challenged all the time. When the opponent was too grown up, his grandfather, himself a habitual criminal, would come to Manuel's rescue. Everything was taken care of neat and clean. Martial arts had taught him that reporting complaints of misdemeanours was not sensible; taking the matter head-on was.

His craft of tattooing also earned him new followers. Children lined up to receive a stamp of his artistic skills. He asserted his leadership status by orchestrating hitting back at the nasty teachers. The children appreciated his tactful arrangements for teachers to be sprayed with rotten papayas. The teachers were furious, the children smiled respectfully.

At Morning-Star Shelter, he went through the usual initiation reserved for all new comers. When the newcomer entered the premises of the living quarters of Morning-Star Shelter, the senior boys ensured that the new boys' heads were covered with a large sheet; then they were repeatedly beaten up by the other members. When Mevin the undisputed leader was about to leave the shelter after turning 18, it was an opportunity for Manuel to grab the leadership to repeat this humiliation on the new boys. Manuel's chance occurred one morning in May 2015. The morning assembly was disrupted by loud shouting from the toilets in the shelter. With cutters in their hands, Pravin and Manuel were at each other's throats, fighting. Police reinforcement had to be called in. What Manuel described later as "*a discussion*" was in fact a fight for leadership.

Fights were common at Morning-Star. Education was no longer Manuel's priority. Anyway, what was he going to use that for? He would have preferred to be at St Spiritan's College. Hence, he persevered in his quest for leadership. A pattern of fights, reconciliation and then more fights were recurrent. "*Striving through the hardship of life was more important than a simple discussion,*" Manuel reported. "*I also had to protect all my followers. I would never allow anyone to touch anyone of my friends. And they in turn, would help me in times of problems. They would lend me their phones during difficult moments.*" That was why Manuel was regarded as "*the leader*". Manuel showed that he had no mercy when there was a fight. "*I was not the type to beg for mercy or offer an apology or whatever. You want to fight, okay. But you don't hit me, as no one has ever put a mark on me. You better be prepared to accept the consequence.*" These tough words were a sharp contrast to his caring sentiments for his sister, Cynthia. He was not a coward and would not run away.

With his cutter in his hand, he attacked Jerome, a neighbourhood boy who challenged him publicly of wanting to start a fight against his own gang. In the scuffle Jerome's cell phone broke. The matter however, did not end there. Raoul, an adult of 33 years challenged Manuel who refused to give Jerome back a new cell phone to replace the broken one. Manuel thought he would have handed it back, but refused to be bullied by another interfering adult. The matter went further. Manuel's father got involved. Manuel did not know really whether it was him or his father that was targeted by Raoul's forthcoming hunting down of Manuel. Manuel had not really wanted his father to become involved; after all he was trying to "*stay clean*" during his respite from prison. With regrets, Manuel learnt later that the father did get involved. This resulted in his father having to go into hiding because Raoul's family were searching for him to take revenge. Raoul was the son of Reegan Anglais, the habitual criminal from Bromwich-West, who actually was in prison too. Finally, Manuel went also into hiding at Morning-Star. He was asked to leave the centre as the youth leaders could no longer ensure his security. After he left Morning-Star, the police caught up with him and he was also accused.

4.3.1.6 *Sandcastles and separations*

Pre-empting the next separation from the Morning-Star Shelter life, Manuel reflected back on how his life had evolved. He still remembered the sweet moments that he had as a family, where Harold, Christiane, Cynthia, Pearl and he were living together at Star-Fruit, playing games, chatting, watching TV. He remembered the good times at the beach in Bromwich-West, lying on a mat under the casuarina trees, the sea bath that they had together. But the sandcastles around him were eroding so fast that within the last six years life had become a mess. His family had crumbled. His friends provided some direction, but they too had moved on. His life was a repeated story of building and separating. Now was the preparation for his entry into the adult world, the dream of being 18. "*If only I could stay a bit longer being a kid*", he wished. Now he would need to get his priorities right.

Manuel has now left the Morning-Star Shelter and is again living with his father at Borealis. Now, Manuel has time to attend to his second dream, that of becoming a singer. He has already composed songs and soon, together with his friends who have a studio and who have lived a difficult life like him, he will be preparing his first music

clip. But soon after he was arrested and is now at the Correctional Youth Centre (CYC). The child who wanted to live all his ambitions to become a professional boxer has seen his dreams vanish. If he had been allowed to join St Spiritan College, would life have been different for him?

4.3.2 Pravin: The tears of a Crocodile

4.3.2.1 *Coming back to Mountain-Plains* for Nani's funeral.*

Pravin is a frail-looking Hindu boy of 16 years old who always looks alert and energetic, though he seems to be reserved. He stayed in a small village in the south of the island, a few kilometres away from the airport.

I was given the opportunity to take Pravin from the shelter back to his village to attend the funeral of Nani, his grandmother. Nani was the most decisive person in the life of Pravin. She was the one who decided to send him to Morning-Star Shelter. As Pravin had to be accompanied by a responsible person from the shelter and as I had previously made a request to the Morning-Star Administration to take Pravin to visit the place where he lived for most of his life, the director agreed that I take him to Mountain-Plains, allow him to attend the burial rituals and then to return him to the shelter. So, I turned up early in the morning of that rainy day for a drive of nearly 2 hours in the dense traffic so he could be there on time.

His face did not betray any of his feelings. All throughout the trip, he was receiving mobile calls from his girlfriends. *"You can go through Beautiful-Rose* or go through the airport road which is longer,"* he told me after nearly one-and-a-half hours. But I preferred to go through the less dense traffic, especially in that rainy weather. Just before reaching the airport, we left the highway and entered a by-road that led to the village of Mountain-Plains, situated in the southern region of Mauritius. Just like in any village, the roads were crowded with various activities going on: the shopkeepers busily setting out their commodities, the hawkers selling their vegetables by the road sides, the cake sellers frying and selling bread and cakes, deep fried, to the villagers who were on their way to work. We turned left to find a place to park the car at the local Mosque and then proceeded to the funeral house. The homestead stood on the main road and this was where Pravin grew up as a child.

Before we got to the funeral home, Pravin asked me to stop at a cake seller's shop at the corner of the road to buy a cake. He looked nervous. Why all this apprehension, I wondered? This was his birth-place but this was his first return after six years at the Morning-Star* centre. I recalled that Pravin was in the shelter for out of school children since he was 10 years of age. In the distance, he showed me the football ground, where he used to spend hours and hours playing with his friends. Further ahead was a supermarket, accessible to all the residents of Mountain-Plains.

Suddenly, Pravin's face lit up. He was no longer the same Pravin that I had met many days before at Morning-Star. The crocodile-like thick-skinned kid was now a softer adolescent with a quiet smile. His eyes twinkled. I could sense his head bursting with memories. While we walked towards his house, he began talking about his brother Mevin* who was two years older than him. Mevin had been his faithful companion in life: *"From childhood we have been very attached to each other. We are like that. We used to be always together."* This was followed by a long quiet pause. I could see the wheels turning in his head. *"What?"* he jumped in startled surprise as I prodded him to move forward. And then, another long pause of silence: lost in his memories.

I remembered how he often talked fondly of his aunt Sunita* who used to take him to the pre-primary school of Berchoo Bay*. *"My parents were too busy working and they did not have time to accompany me to school or to care for my studies,"* he claimed. Life was hard at the village and his father, Rajen* had to work in the construction industry during the day. Being uneducated, his father helped the construction workers lay the metal reinforcement on which the concrete roofs were laid. At night, he worked in the Tuna factory. Pravin recalled that his father used to leave the house between 6.00 and 7.00 in the morning and was back home by 16.30 or 17.00 hours in the evening.

"My father did make an effort to take me to school at times, but that was because my mother Nalinee had left home." But his father did not seem to do anything right in Pravin's eyes. He could not even take this responsibility of taking him to school dutifully or regularly on time. *"I remember the time when my father forgot me at home and went to work; he forgot me at home,"* he giggled. But it was always aunt Sunita that had to step in to help him. Frowning, he knew that it was again a lack of consideration from his father towards him. Pravin remembered how when he had problems in school, it was always aunt Sunita who came in-lieu of his parents as they were busy working and

did not have time to meet his teachers or the administrative staff. *“I was regularly absent during the time I was in first Standard. I did not like school. My parents did not even know whether I was absent regularly from school,”* he added. But then he started to make friends when he joined second Standard (Grade 2) and since then he was regular in his classes. His first three years of schooling were fun as he enjoyed himself a lot with his friends. *“There was nothing much to do in class. We were asked to sing or repeat everything that the teacher said. Then the teacher left us alone to talk to the next door teacher and one of my classmates would note down the names of those who disturbed the class. But as my friend was the one who noted the names, my name never appeared on the blackboard, so I was never punished,”* he added mischievously. But yet he did not escape the usual punishment for those who disturbed the class, from standing on the bench, to *“doing the donkey”* in front of class, kneeling with books on the head whenever he misbehaved.

When he reached fourth Standard he felt the teaching suddenly changed. He was asked to do things that he had not learnt in Standard 3 (Grade 3). When he declared to the teacher that he did not understand anything, he was beaten for class disturbance. *“My teacher told me to shut up and not to disturb those who wanted to study. I knew that those who wanted to study were those who were taking tuitions from him,”* he claimed. He and a group of friends did not have the means to take private tuition and so they felt left out in class. He felt that those parts of the lessons that he did not know could have been covered during private tuition. He sensed that he was harassed by his class teacher because he and his friends protested against that injustice. He wanted to show his power by ill-treating and beating up the children who took tuitions. Out of anger, his friends and he beat up the teacher as he started responding to injustice by his own violence. *“As I felt powerless against the teacher and his group of favourites, I vowed to myself that I would make them pay for it,”* he added. Once when he was attending ICT class, some of the same children were bullying him in class and he turned back and broke a slate on one of the learner’s head. But as he had his wits about him, he always managed to get out of these situations without being punished but instead he was warned twice. He was aware that if there was a third warning then he ran the risk of being expelled from school. He used to share those moments when he came back home from school and he related the trouble he had been involved in to Sunita. She would always ask him to behave in school so that he would not be expelled.

Meanwhile his family life became disturbed due to his father's frequent abuses. With all his family problems, it was difficult for Pravin to listen to Sunita's judicious advice. He wished he could share those moments with his parents too but they were never at home. He felt that he could not afford to lose his place as he felt happy at school. The place as well as his friends had become a refuge to escape from the family problems.

Pravin recalled that his mother, Naline,* worked in the textile industry and that she left early in the morning. But he could not remember anything more about her. I believe that he consciously stopped making the effort to remember her, or simply did not like talking about her. *"I stopped seeing her after some time. She disappeared. She just left us. I did not see her anymore,"* he said angrily. She did not even come to see him in the Morning-Star Shelter. Yet, he felt he could not blame her. Her life has not been a bed of roses. As a mother she saw how her children were being ill-treated by their father. This was why Mevin was sent away to live with his grandmother. Nani (their paternal grandmother) protected Mevin from his father's abuse. Instead Pravin felt that he then became the object of focus of his father's anger. Perhaps Mevin represented his father's failure and this made him dislike his son even more. But it was Pravin, who stayed with him who became the punching bag. Pravin suggested that his mother tried to appease her husband's anger, but every day was a living hell for her. Why did she return home every day, he wondered: just to protect her children? When Pravin was 7, his mother made up her mind to leave Rajen as she could no longer live with him. Pravin felt that this departure was like a betrayal. *"I love my mother a lot, more than my father. But, yes, on one side I have a grudge against her. But I still love her,"* he lamented. Things only got worse after she left.

4.3.2.2 *I was beaten and treated worse than a dog.*

"My father became more violent after my mother left the family homestead. Previously he merely slapped me, especially when I was naughty. But my father became more aggressive when he happened to find out that Mevin, my brother had come over to visit me, especially when he was not at home," Pravin recalled. Who was all this hatred directed at? Pravin thought this was really targeted at his mother who abandoned them, and at Mevin who was protected outside the home. Pravin thought he was less of a victim than his mother and Mevin. And yet, he did not know really why his father had so much of hatred for Mevin. *"He has a grudge against my brother and I don't know why."*

Pravin's eyes filled with tears when he remembered how he and Mevin suffered the blows of Rajen.

Pravin, even though only seven, believed at the time that the entry of Sadna into his father's life caused his mother to leave. Sadna was his father's new mistress. This made matters worse. Pravin was forced to accompany his unfaithful father during his visits to Sadna because he could not be left alone in the house. And there, at Sadna's house, Tengur and Rajini, the two children of Sadna would humiliate him. *"They told me a lot of unpleasant things, 'Hey, you, go away. Go back to your place. You are a nuisance to us here' "*, he added in tears. That was too much for Pravin. It was worse when Sadna and her two children came to stay at Rajen's place. Pravin felt he no longer had a place in his own home. At the same time, his school performances started going from bad to worse and he started having more and more behaviour problems. Pravin was lucky that his teachers knew about his familial situation and as in the village there was a great deal of solidarity among the inhabitants, the teachers wilfully closed their eyes on his homework and tried to help him in school. *"I was in Grade five and the lessons were getting harder for me. I started missing classes, sometimes for weeks because I was sent to stay at my cousin's place in Kat Kolonn. When I came back, I could no longer follow because I missed too much,"* he lamented.

Soon his family problems took the upper hand on his school problems. Pravin avoided coming home and decided to redirect his energies towards outside sporting activities. His training on the soccer field, or in the boxing gym, was an opportunity for him to escape going home early. This sparked the wrath of his father who now resorted to beating him up, this time with a belt. Pravin wanted just to be left alone. His *"naughtiness"* increased into a kind of revolt against both his father and his mistress. So did the beatings. His grandmother stepped in and sent both Mevin and Pravin to spend more regular time away from the aggressive father's home in their uncle's home. Soon Mevin and Pravin spent increasingly more time with their cousins away from the family home. Pravin felt that his family was getting rid of him to make place for Rajen's newfound family. But when they returned after a little while, life was not any better. While staying with his father and his mistress, Pravin took every opportunity to rebel. This only led to more brutality. *"My life had become messy and distasteful. I preferred*

to stay away from home till late after training because I did not want to be in the house with them,” he explained.

Sadna too used the slightest excuse to make his life a hell. She annoyed him by openly paying more attention to her own children. Pravin felt he was never loved and everyone around his home seemed to provoke him to burst out in temper fits. *“It was like you treat a dog. Yes, I must say like a dog.”* So, one day it all burst out. Both Mevin and Pravin could not take their father’s brutality anymore. They simply chose to fight back and retaliate physically when their father beat them. There was no other way, Pravin believed, and this was one way Mevin and him could stand together. This response of the children against their father was a major event in the extended family. The uncles had to intervene to stop the fight. Pravin added his uncles’ intervention as further evidence that he and Mevin did not receive much support from the relatives.

4.3.2.3 *Nani the Maestro*

As we reached the funeral house, Pravin’s cousins, aunts and uncles were waiting for him. I was introduced to them as the person from Morning-Star who accompanied Pravin to attend the funeral rites. And in he went to see Nani’s corpse lying on the bed. He remembered how she had been the person who kept harmony in this family. The plot of land on which Nani, Uncle Anil and aunt Sunita, Rajen’s brother and sister, lived belonged to Pravin’s grandfather. Nani worked hard as a domestic servant with a Muslim family to keep the household coffers running. She accepted the job even though she was getting old and sick as she was convinced she had to protect her two grandchildren. After Pravin’s mother left, Nani felt that Pravin had become a liability for his father. Rajen was adamant in taking his mistress home, claiming things would work out better. Nani knew that Pravin was getting more rebellious than his older brother, Mevin. She felt that Mevin was gentler because he stayed with her whereas Pravin stayed with his father and his new partner. She also felt that sending Pravin to the cousin’s place at Kat-Kolonn was not really a solution as he had missed school for more than two months. But as Kat Kolonn was far from Mountain-Plains, Nani thought that Pravin would calm down there. But Pravin was adamant that he had to come back home and he started

becoming more and more rebellious up to a point where there was a serious clash between Rajen on one side and Pravin and Mevin on the other side. He remembered that Nani told Anil, her “Beta”,¹⁰ how she was worried about her “Nathi”¹¹ and that she thought of sending him to hospital for a check-up. Pravin knew that she regretted having to take the drastic decision of sending him away, but he also knew that she was too old and sick to look after him. And yet, Pravin did not bear any grudge against the grandmother and was even grateful for her support.

Sunita was the aunt who took him to school almost every morning at Berchoo-Bay Primary School. Pravin remembered those happy moments where he would stroll along the by-roads leading to the school, with all his friends heading towards the same destination. Uncle Anil was the one who separated the brothers and the father during their fight. This is the place where he spent his childhood and where Mevin and he used to play on the play station, despite his encounters with Rajen. His two cousins Dil and Kumar, the children of Sunita, completed the group of people who offered their support during those difficult times. Pravin remembered how Sunita replaced the absences of his parents. As neither Nalineer nor Rajen were ever there to take him to school, it was Sunita who cared for him. Whenever he was not able to do his homework, it was again Sunita who helped. Suddenly, Pravin came out of his dreams as Sunita, at the funeral house, asked me to help take Pravin and his cousins to the cemetery to attend to some paperwork for the crematory. On the way, Pravin showed me the shop where he spent most of his time during the afternoons and his spare time. I stopped the car and suddenly right at the corner of the road appeared an exuberant old Chinese man with a large grin on his face, arms wide open. He came from a shop and I guess that this would be the shopkeeper that Pravin mentioned. *“Ah Kong is the shopkeeper who always did good things for me. He showed me the good paths to follow. Whenever I was free I spent some time in the shop to help him.”* Pravin went running to him too, arms wide open and they embraced each other, exchanging a lot of unintelligible words. It was clear they loved each other dearly. Ah Kong* asked me to step into the shop for a cool drink but time was running out, so I refused politely, with a promise of coming back one

¹⁰ Son

¹¹ Grandson

day, with Pravin, maybe after his 18th birthday. On our way to the cemetery, Pravin waved to a group of adolescents near Berchoo-Bay School. These were his friends.

4.3.2.4 *There are friends and friends*

Pravin's face lit up, remembering the good times he had had with his friends who were all from his home environment. They had always been around since the age of five. He still remembered how Alvin, Preetam, Patrick, Devdass, Shakeel, Tony and Ravi would take their bicycles to go to the beach at Battalion Ground during the weekends. They used to meet near the Great Buddha statue near the jetty. There they sat in the kiosk and teased the passers-by or changed into their swim suit to enjoy the warm blue ocean. It was all laughter and fun. At other times they went to swim in the lake or played football on the football field. Though Pravin spent a lot of his free time with his friends, he also enjoyed the company of Ah Kong in his shop. The shop was his haven. So, any free time he had, he spent in the company of Ah Kong, who groomed him to be someone in life. If only he had stayed here, he felt that he would have surmounted all his problems, but circumstances of life forced him to move from Mountain-Plains to Bromwich-West. But even after his mother left, those same friends became a huge support for him. He remembered how during his school days, his friends and he would organise parties in class. It was during the first term of his last year in school. He had no idea he would soon be sent to the shelter. They all brought some snacks from home and every two months they would have a party, whether Mr Umesh, the class teacher agreed or not. For Pravin, those moments contrasted with the horrible time he was having at home and just recalling them came as a breath of fresh air. He knew that he could depend entirely on these real friends unlike those at the Morning-Star Shelter. *"At the shelter the friends would spy on me and keep watch on all my movements to tell Alan, the director of Morning-Star. Among friends, you do not do these things,"* he said with bitterness. He suddenly was contrasting his life in the village with his life after being sent to Morning-Star. Pravin was very quick to react to these moments that had marked him so much. He was particularly hurt by his stepmother and her children's attitude and behaviour, and now the friends who betrayed him. He felt that anger coming back to him and though at times he was very soft-spoken, gentle and emotional, yet there were times when he had such anger that he felt like exploding. He accepted that he did not know where that anger comes from. *"It just leads to fits of temper. It has all to do with*

my father.” He seemed to be like a crocodile rolling on itself, at times the thick skin appeared but at other times it was the soft under-belly. Suddenly his mobile rang. It was another girlfriend phoning him. And then I remembered him telling me that he hated women.

4.3.2.5 *I wish I could erase all the mistakes.*

Pravin dreamt of having a nice job, a house that he would build himself and a nice girl to get married to. He thought that maybe he had to correct mistakes, his own and those of his father. He really regretted all his actions while at the same time he was also convinced that Rajen was responsible for what he had become. It all had to do with the parents’ separation. *“I remember those days where we were all going to the seaside as a family, the stories we used to relate to one another, the happy times at birthdays, parties we had.”* Pravin was now engaged in a monologue. *“My parents have spoilt everything. Though I am not responsible for all that happened, since the age of 8 I dream of repairing my parents’ errors and have a life where I will not repeat the same mistakes. Even though it will take me a life time, I am determined to do it. The choice of my bride-to-be will be very meticulous, because some women are bad, wicked. They will use you and when they no longer need you, they will drop you like dirt.”* The language was harsh and I guess it was meant for his mother, despite the love he had for her. Suddenly his face was mixed with gloom and anger. *“They have all left me and gone: my father, my mother and even my brother, Mevin,”* he said with sadness. Mevin had been his sole support all throughout his life and even at Morning-Star. Pravin had tears in his eyes, remembering those days where he was protected by his brother. After Mevin left Morning-Star at the age of 18, he was alone among a bunch of back-biters. He was convinced though that he was a victim of black magic and that was why he forgets everything. *“I was in love with a girl when I was going to school at Mountain-Plains. No one was able to explain to me what happened on that day. I heard that she was in hospital but I don’t know whether she committed suicide or not. The next day I was also admitted to the hospital. The same day she got out, it was about ten, ten-thirty when she reached home. I went to the river for a swim accompanied by my brother, my cousins, my friends and some girls also. Her cousin was with her at home. The cousin was the one who told me everything later. I don’t know where my girlfriend had obtained my bracelet, my hair, there were bits of hair. I dived in the water and*

suddenly I felt two hands pulling my legs down. I sank. I was drowning. I sank completely, completely, till the bottom. I have no idea what happened to me. Apparently, I lost consciousness and I don't even know who saved me." Was Nani aware of that event when she took Pravin for a check-up in hospital before he was sent to the shelter? He would not know. Since then he hated women but then decided that it was better to make them suffer and break their heart. That is why he had so many girlfriends now. And these relationships, especially at Morning Star, contributed to his difficulty to concentrate at Bromwich- West Primary School.

4.3.2.6 Morning Star did not allow me to join secondary school

At 10 Pravin was sent to Bromwich-West Government School because Morning-Star Shelter¹² was in the same region as the school. On his first day at his new school he was greeted by the teacher and the learners. Changing school was difficult for him, as he could not make friends due to the proximity of the shelter to the school. However, he felt that the teacher did not like his face, even though he behaved in class and did all his homework. He could feel the prejudice of the school staff and children just because he was in a shelter. He remembered that at Berchoo-Bay government School, his rapport with the teachers was quite good: Pravin remembered how he and his classmates, his friends, would transform Mr. Umesh's class into a class party. Apart from missing school regularly at the age of nine because of his family problems, he was not a bad boy and whenever he was given an opportunity, he focused on his studies. However, he was caught between those who tried to help him and his friends, who, in class, would rather disturb the lessons. Whenever he tried to be a front-bencher in class, his friends pulled him to the back. One part of him wanted to succeed but on the other hand he also needed the support of his friends during those difficult moments. But when he left Mountain-Plains, schooling was not the same anymore. He joined Bromwich-West School in June, during the second term of fifth Standard. Perturbed by the recent events that happened in his life, Pravin felt a blank. *"I forgot everything since the time I came here*

¹² Children who were already attending a primary school before they were moved to the shelter, were allowed to continue their primary schooling in a primary school found in the same region as the shelter. As the shelter was found in Bromwich-West region, the closest school to the shelter was Bromwich-West government School.

because of black-magic,” he added. “My whole life was spoilt after I left Berchoo-Bay. The teacher at Bromwich-West Primary School would look at me as if I was a rogue. I was not a bad boy. I was behaving in his class. I was doing all the work given, all class work and homework. He simply did not like my face.” He felt that he was not welcome in the class. He sensed the stigma that society had put on children in shelters, because they all knew that he resided in the nearby shelter. When the teacher explained in English, Pravin felt that he needed time to grasp the language as the text and the explanations were too quick for him, and when he told the teacher that he could not understand, he could see the sneer in his eyes. *“I failed my sixth Standard, and I was to repeat my sixth Standard class to sit again for the end of the year Certificate of Primary Education examination.”* He felt lonely in Bromwich-West and he did not have any one to support him, no friends, no aunt Sunita, no Ah Kong. He felt at times that he wanted to get extra help but he had no friends in school and not enough money to get private tuitions as the administration of the shelter was receiving only around nine thousand rupees¹³ allowance for the expenses of each child in the centre.

When he was in the sixth Standard, he became more extroverted and started having sexual relationships with a few girls in his class. He was 11 at that time. At the same time he remembered how he was having problems with his teacher who reported him regularly to the head-teacher. He begged the head-teacher not to report him to the shelter administrator as otherwise he would be sent to the Rehabilitation Youth Centre. He promised to behave and in return he was not punished. But he felt harassed by the teacher all day long as the teacher knew that he could not retaliate.

Luckily for him, he had another teacher in the repeaters’ class. *“But in the repeaters’ class, I made a lot of effort in English and I succeeded.”* He knew that he had to make an effort in English and also in the other subjects if he wanted to pass in his examinations because most of the examination papers were set in English. That desire to surpass himself had always been present in him and he was determined to succeed. For Pravin, if he passed in four subjects, he would be successful even if he did not make the

¹³ Approximately US\$246

grade in his weak subjects: English and French. He knew that there were parts of the English and French papers that he did not understand and had just filled in the blanks and options with wild guesses or crosses. Coming from a village and living in a family where everyone was Creole speaking or Bhojpuri speaking meant that he did not have access to English and French as a child. In fact, he succeeded in ICT, History, Geography and Mathematics, his favourite subjects. However, he did not succeed in English and French. But he was convinced he would obtain admission in a state secondary school as he really believed he had passed. *“I knew that I had passed otherwise I would not have qualified for admission to a state secondary school,”* Pravin claimed. He seemed to be unaware of the criteria for a CPE pass. He did not know that he had to succeed in English, French and Mathematics which were the core subjects and two other subjects to be awarded a pass. With the results that he had obtained, he was only admitted to a prevocational section, excluded from the mainstream sections¹⁴. But even then, he was not allowed to join Panda State Secondary School because of an internal administrative decision that children from a shelter were not allowed to join a prevocational section if the centre was already providing some form of informal education, which was the case for Morning-Star. He was aware of this decision, *“It was Morning-Star that prevented me from joining the college, just like they did for Manuel, Denis and Ram, all members of the shelter.”* And at the shelter, no one is allowed out of the walls without permission. That was the reason why I had to ask permission to take him to Mountain-Plains because I was only a trainee at the shelter and for security reasons, I was not allowed to take children out of the NGO, without permission.

Pravin remembered that he joined the Morning-Star Knowledge Hub instead of going to Panda State Secondary School. His first year was quite fruitful as he had a good relationship with the teachers. However, under the influence of his other friends of the

¹⁴ A child doing CPE has to sit for several examination papers. English, French and Mathematics are called core subjects. Non-core subjects are History and Geography, ICT, and Science. Oriental language is optional, meaning that a child may sit for the core and non-core subjects but abstain to sit for the oriental Language paper. Children have therefore the possibility to sit for either six subjects or seven subjects. A pass in all three core subjects and any two non-core subjects, including Oriental Language' carries a grade 'Pass'. However, Oriental Language as a non-core subject is accepted in the criteria for award of a Pass certificate. A failure in any core subject automatically grades a student as a 'failure'. The child can re-sit for all the papers and a second failure means that the child is not promoted to the normal stream but to the prevocational section, very often in the same secondary institution.

shelter, Mevin, Denis, Manuel, Ram, his behaviour changed completely. He started also to have friends in the immediate environment of the shelter and soon he started smoking and taking cannabis. Jerry, his youth leader who was aged 26, was easily fooled by the cunning residents of the shelter and was not able to keep an eye on them. He no longer respected the teachers in the Hub and learning was no longer his priority. He realised now that because of his bad behaviour, Alan, the shelter director, preferred to send him on placement rather than keep him in the Hub.

However, it was time to return. Pravin seemed very reluctant to leave his aunts, cousins and friends. In fact, the demise of the person who decided to send him to the shelter was an opportunity for him to be re-united temporarily to those who supported him. Would he have been different if he had stayed among those who loved him? *“Being sent to Morning- Star was the turning point,”* he claimed.

Today, Pravin is striving hard to find a placement for a job. He has tried his hand in a computer-recycling company but did not like it when he was scolded and left. Then it was in a car-tyre repairs workshop but left within two weeks. He is simply waiting for the time when he will be 18 so that he can go back to his family in his village. When I saw how reluctant he was to leave them to go back to the shelter, I guessed that with the solidarity that exists in the village, he would be able to cope in life, but at what expense? He is now 17, and waiting anxiously for his 18th birthday to go back to his village.

4.3.3 Byron: The ordeal of a stammerer

4.3.3.1 *I have not learnt anything and I don’t have a job.*

Byron, now 17, has left Morning-Star Knowledge Hub section where he was in informal schooling for the last two years¹⁵. While the Knowledge Hub was intended to provide

¹⁵ Many children who drop out from school before the age of sixteen often attend an informal setting that either provides facilities to reach an acceptable level of literacy and numeracy and to learn basic skills so as to enter the world of unskilled jobs after the age of sixteen or to re-sit for the CPE again and again. The primary school certificate is not only a certificate that offers transition to a secondary institution but it also serves as a criterion to access certain jobs in the public sector.

school dropouts with a potential route into acquiring enough skills to earning a living, after the end of compulsory education at 16, he felt that it was useless to attend the classes as he had not learnt anything that could get him a stable job. One of the benefits of attending the Hub was that he was given a free bus pass to ride without costs on the public transport which was available for all school-going children on the island, and also to get a free breakfast and lunch, provided by the centre. There were clearly benefits of being a learner in an informal institution. Furthermore, as an orphan, Byron was entitled to an orphan's allowance as long as he was in a recognised institution undergoing formal or non-formal schooling. Having stopped formal schooling at the age of 14, Dorina, Byron's mother, made sure that Byron attended Morning-Star Knowledge Hub to continue to benefit from the allowance until he was aged 16. Though he would have preferred to be on his own, Byron believed that Dorina would be relieved to know that he was not on the streets during the day. Byron had no choice but to abide. But when he was 16, he found no further reason to continue his schooling. He pretended that he had lost the bus pass, and as he did not have any means to pay for the bus fare to attend Morning-Star, he stopped going to the centre and looked for a job instead. He told Dorina that the issue of a fresh bus pass would need further financial investment and as he did not have the means to pay for it,¹⁶ he chose to stay at home.

Finally, Byron decided to take a job as a lorry-helper. He got up early in the morning, to help the driver during his journey whenever he was called to. Sometimes he uploaded and downloaded cement bags and at other times he carried bricks or reinforcement iron-rods to and from the construction sites. Byron had never envisaged how tedious work would be. He stopped working and preferred to hang around with his group of friends from the gymnasium, the same ones who were part of his life during the difficult moments in his home. He saw how they were well dressed in the latest fashion. He soon discovered that they had become a gang of robbers. As he also needed to earn a living, he decided to accompany them. When they were accused of stealing a car, his friends

¹⁶ Children attending an educational (formal or informal) institution are provided with a bus pass at the beginning of the year so that they benefit from the free travelling for students, issued by the welfare system. If the bus pass is lost during the year, a new one is issued against payment of Rs. 300, equivalent to approximately \$ 10 US. A child not possessing a valid bus pass would not benefit from the free travelling by bus from his Institution and home and vice-versa and would need to pay his bus fare.

denied being involved and accused him instead. He was scared of their intentions if he denied and as he did not want to finish his days in the Rehabilitation Youth Centre, he pleaded guilty. He spent eight days in prison. He has been released on bail until formal charges are formulated against him later this current year. He did not want to end up like his cousin Manuel, who is still at the Correctional Youth Centre. Byron wonders what has happened in his life for him to have reached this state.

4.3.3.2 *The birth of the chrysalis*

When Byron was four, his mother sent him to a pre-primary school at Battalion Ground. There was a lot of pride in him as other children close to his house did not have the means to attend Battalion Ground pre-primary school which was the closest early-educational institution in the region. There were no pre-primary institutions in Pink-Bell. *“Every day I would travel by bus to Battalion Ground in the company of my mother and my younger sister, Gloria,”* he happily explained. Gloria was two years younger than him. At five, he was enrolled at the primary school in the region, where he started making friends with the children of the village. *“My elder brother, George would look after me and anyone who interfered in my football game in the company of my classmates would get a good beating,”* he said with a mischievous grin. George was already a learner of Pink-Bell government School and was on the point of finishing his primary school studies. How could he forget those fantastic moments he had had with his parents at Pink-Bell¹⁷, his birth-place. *“We were living in a tiny concrete house and my mother would keep the place neat and tidy,”* he recalled, and so when he came back from school it was always a pleasure to step in the house. From the time Dorina was involved in a relationship with Eric, she devoted all her time to her children’s well-being and to her husband. Eric, Byron’s father, was working as a freelance mason, and his competencies were well appreciated in the region, and that meant that Dorina did not have to earn a living. That was why he could afford going to a fee-paying pre-primary school.

¹⁷ All names of places and people are pseudonyms

At home, Dorina was helped by Jacintha, Byron's paternal grandmother, who was staying with them. *"My mother used to go on errands to Perly to buy clothes at the clothes-fair and Gloria and I would wait eagerly to see the 'new' clothes we would get to wear,"* he recalled enthusiastically. After her return, Jacintha would take the children to Pink-Bell centre to buy the other assorted shoes, socks, underwear to match the clothes their mother had bought. *"My grandmother would spend all her meagre retirement money on us especially during Christmas time,"* he realised now. Christmas was the moment that he enjoyed most. It was always Jacintha who would purchase their first Christmas toys. His thoughts went to those happy moments when his grandmother would pamper them as if they were her own children. He believed that his parents were always too busy. Jacintha also used to sew his school uniforms and he was always complimented on the way he was dressed in school.

Every day after school, he would wait for Eric to come back from work. After work, Eric would shower, watch TV, while enjoying a piece of bread and butter and a cup of hot tea. They too came to sit near their father to watch TV. Even though Eric would query about their progress at school, it was mostly Dorina who helped them in their homework even though she was uneducated. As they sat as a family watching a French film, Byron would explain to Dorina his problems in school. *"I cannot understand English at all. Even though I receive help from my friends, I still don't understand anything,"* he lamented. Even when he was in pre-primary, he used to play with coloured carton shapes of different sizes but he was never able to learn the alphabet or the songs in English, even though Miss Anita helped. He was not used to this language that sounded funny as at home they spoke only in Creole. He was easily annoyed when the other kids would respond in English to the teacher. Primary schooling at Pink-Bell Government School too was fun, except that at times he would be scolded or beaten just because he could not understand the English or French words that were being taught. All the neighbours, Eric's drinking mates and their children also speak in Creole.

While pondering about the neighbours, Byron remembered how his father was a heavy drinker and smoker. Dorina and Eric were frequently having arguments about his father's drinking and especially the smoking, but he thought that those arguments were normal between husband and wife. But the smoking was more serious an issue because Eric suffered from chronic asthma. The frequent drinking and smoking during the cold season

would be fatal to Eric. Byron recalled the doctor telling Eric to always have his inhaler at hand. At the same time, he had to avoid going out in cold and rainy weather and protect himself from getting wet or catching a cold. This was especially difficult as he had to work outdoors sometimes in inclement weather. How else was he to feed his family?

On a cold winter day, Eric would usually sit inside the house drinking, accompanied by his neighbours sometimes. Byron did not approve of his father's drinking bouts with his friends during the week. Eric never smoked in the house but went outside to smoke, even in winter. *"I did not like that he went out in the yard to smoke a cigarette when he was drinking,"* Byron remembered. He felt that one day Eric's smoking outside in the cold would cause a problem. And it did.

On one occasion after a few drinks, he stepped out into the cold wintery breeze to smoke a cigarette, consciously ignoring his doctor's advice. His lungs suddenly started to constrict and he was soon out of breath. He shouted for help but no words came out from his mouth. When Dorina came out to check on her husband, she saw him lying on the ground, his face slightly purple. As she cried out in despair, Byron and Gloria shouted to Uncle Suresh, Andy and Sunil, Eric's neighbours. By the time his friends and the ambulance arrived, Eric was already lifeless and all efforts to revive him were in vain. The children lost their father aged only 26. That was a huge blow for Byron. He always had a premonition that one day or the other Eric would be in trouble because of his drinking. This explains Byron's aversion to alcohol. He refused to take alcohol even when his friends urged him to. With tears in his eyes, Byron recalled *"those lovely times when I went to meet him at work. We used to chat and share jokes in that little time that we had and he used to ask me whether I was able to solve my English problems in class."* He felt both anger and pain when he thought of the way his father died. He was angry because Eric was not able to receive medical attention fast enough to be saved, and filled with pain because he did not have time to cherish him for long. If only he could go back in time, his only wish would be to help his father back to life. *"I was at a loss, bewildered as I started going back to school after my father's death. I could see the expression of sympathy on my teachers' and friends' face and I suddenly could no longer concentrate in class. That fateful moment haunted me,"* he claimed.

All the memories of life prior to Eric's death come back to him. As a happy family, they would stroll to Pink-Bell centre for a walk or at the beach at Green-Bay for a picnic where his sister and he would enjoy the swim. He liked to be where there was animation and crowds, and Pink-Bell was the right place for that. Those moments of joy would haunt him for years. After Eric's death, Dorina took the decision to move away from Pink-Bell. Byron thought that it was because the absence of their father was too hard to bear. His paternal grandmother remained in their original family home. *"One of the reasons why I rarely come to see Jacintha although I have been brought up there is because of the painful memories associated to the place and family life,"* he painfully admitted. To make matters worse for him, Byron found out that Dorina did not have any legal right to inherit the house as she was not legally married to Eric. Jacintha, Byron, Gloria and George were the sole heirs of Eric. Furthermore, Dorina was not entitled to a widow's allowance whereas the children obtained an orphan allowance as long as they were in school. *"Maybe that was why she did not want to stay at Pink Bell or maybe the souvenir of Eric was haunting her also,"* he pondered.

4.3.3.3 Deception

Byron was slowly convinced by Dorina that the death of their father was an act of God. Nothing could be changed and they had to continue living. As Eric had been the sole breadwinner of the family, Dorina could not raise the three children alone despite help from neighbours. So she decided to leave Pink-Bell and move to a suburban area. The move would have the two advantages of convenience and proximity to her family. It also meant that it would be easier to get a job, even though she would now have to pay rent, water and electricity bills.

But Byron's and Dorina's views did not coincide. He was simply not keen on moving. For him that meant changing school, and missing the company of Suresh's, Andy's and Sunil's children who were like brothers and sisters to him and Gloria. That also meant that he would no longer see his friends with whom he enjoyed his school days. But Byron had no say in the decision and so for him, as long as George was going to be with him, he would have to adapt to his new surroundings.

But to his surprise, George, who was already in college¹⁸ at that time decided to stay with Jacintha. Byron felt abandoned and betrayed by his brother, and that was not the first time. He remembered how George had been his protector at primary school. *“When I joined Grade 1 at Pink-Bell primary school, George acted as my protector whenever I was playing football with my friends. No other children would interfere in our games as George was always present to help me fight the intruders,”* he remembered. But George left when he joined Grade 2. Byron felt that he had been abandoned by his brother. He was deceived when George decided to stay with Jacintha as he felt that George was getting all the affection of the grandmother. *“My brother is allowed to do whatever he wants. He can choose to go to work if he wants to, whereas I do not have this freedom of choice,”* he lamented.

Byron was therefore forced to follow Dorina who chose to stay where her sister had stayed before. Her old friend, Cindy, was able to find her a house in the sub-areas of Rose-Mountain, at Pleasure-Land. Byron noticed that the concrete house was situated in a surrounding where four other families were staying. He was taken aback. He hardly had any space to breathe. *“Oh my!,”* exclaimed Byron, *“how did I end up here, with so much noise from people and traffic outside and from the neighbours and their dogs barking one whole night in the surrounding? This place is dull.”* How he missed his father and his Pink-Bell. He realised that as a seven-year-old child, he had to bear the brunt of the neighbours. That is always the case in suburban regions, where the bossy and prudish neighbours impose their rules of do’s and don’ts. Byron thought of running away to Pink-Bell to his aunt Christiane’s place, his mother’s sister. *“In case of a problem, that’s where I would go,”* he thought to himself, unaware of the distance between the two localities.

By that time Byron was attending Stanton Government School and this transition was not easy for him. He missed his old school friends. Moreover life at Stanton Government School was not easy. He had lost his faithful friends from Pink-Bell and though the children in his school wanted to be friends with him, he did not want their friendship.

¹⁸ Secondary School

Being friends meant trouble, *“Here I have no friends to roam about. If a fight breaks out, I can be pulled in as being part of the fight. It has happened often,”* Byron exclaimed. Dorina had warned him to stay aloof of the children in the school. As a result he started to isolate himself as a solitary child. His isolation soon turned into a stammering. His school grades were much lower than those he scored at Pink-Bell School. During lunch time he roamed about in the school yard aimlessly. He did not have anyone to confide in, to tell his problems in class. *“My mother used to ask me about my problems in school when I was at Pink-Bell, but she did not have time for me anymore,”* he pondered.

His transition from Grade 3 to Grade 4 in upper primary coincided with Eric’s death and the transfer to Stanton Government School in the suburbs. This transfer to a new school with new children, new classrooms and a new teacher perturbed Byron. He felt that at Stanton School, everything, the teaching and explanations were done quickly as compared to his lessons in Pink-Bell. The class teacher, Mr Arnold, who was in his fifties seemed to be always in a hurry. *“As soon as he entered the class, he quickly explained the lesson, copied it on the blackboard and asked us to copy it. Then, sitting down on his chair facing the learners, his protruding belly resting on the table, he floated off into a lost world of his dreams,”* recalled Byron. He felt that Mr Arnold seemed angry, as if he did not like to be in the school with children who could not work on their own. Byron was not used to this way of learning. It seemed that the teacher’s task was mainly to write work for them on the board. Byron felt that it became the children’s responsibility to understand and make meaning on their own. *“I had not understood anything and when I sought for help from my classmates, I was scolded for disturbing the class. When I saw the boys at the back of the classroom pulling out their lunch-boxes and munching their sandwiches, I did not mind joining them to swap and share sandwiches with them.”* He soon realised that this was more fun.

As time went by, Byron was more and more with the back-benchers and slowly became an accepted full member of *“the back-benchers”* who, everyone knew, did not understand anything that was being taught. Their joy was simply to find ways of disturbing the class. Byron joined in the fun. *“I started getting the usual punishment inflicted on disturbers. I soon learnt how to take the frog’s posture at the front of the class, or being told to turn my face to the wall, or kneel down or even stand on the*

chair or do the donkey,” he explained with a grin. Though at first he felt a bit humiliated, he soon realised that this was indeed a means of gaining attention, especially when the frontbenchers would watch them and make fun of them. He knew that during the recreation time, they would be made to pay for it. Every other day, the first lesson was the correction of homework. That was a hard time for the back-benchers. All those in front would get their homework corrected individually; then came the turn of the back-benchers. *“I was used to being beaten with a ruler on the knuckles for not doing my homework. The others are taking private tuition, but I did not have the means for private tuition. Furthermore, how could I do my homework with all the neighbour’s dogs barking,”* he grumbled, but to no avail. Though the punishment was painful, he never informed Dorina of his difficulties, especially in English and French. She would not have time for him anyway. He believed that since Dorina came to see the secretary of the school every end of the month, she could at least ask how he was faring, not knowing that she came to collect an attestation of his monthly attendance. He did not know that without this attestation he would not receive his monthly orphan allowance.

However, he did try his best to study. He even asked help from Martha, Dorina’s friend and Mr Martin, a teacher from the school. But as days went by, he realised that there was no point, as everything was becoming more and more difficult. *“I studied,”* he said emphatically, *“but, sometimes I was not able to do the class work because it was becoming more difficult and complex. We were being prepared to sit for the end-of-year examination and we were simply told that we needed to pass in English, French and Mathematics if we were to be successful.”* For the end-of-year examination, he sat down in class without answering the questions and handed blank answer sheets. *“How could I answer when I did not understand the questions set in English?”* he asked.

Byron started to miss his mother’s company at home as Dorina had found a job at The Riverlet in a teddy-bear factory. As growing children, Byron and Gloria’s needs increased and Dorina found it hard to run the household and meet the children’s needs with her meagre salary, although she did as much overtime as available. When Dorina ended up living with Robinson, a man from Stanton, Byron did not understand why his mother had to live in cohabitation. He was too young and naïve to realise that Dorina had to pay a rent, the electricity and water bills, as well as cater for their needs in terms of school

uniforms, books, lunch, clothes and shoes. Jacintha was no longer looking after the neatness of his school uniform or buying clothes and shoes for him. *"In class most of the children looked neat and their clothes smelt nice,"* he remembered, *"but my mother could wash our uniforms only during the weekends."*

Things did not get better for him with the birth of his step-brother, Tom. He believed that now Dorina no longer had time to devote to him, because her love was to be shared only between Gloria and Tom. He was relieved when Robinson left the house after a big fight with Dorina. Byron was glad when Tom went to stay with his father. His happiness was short-lived. Dorina soon began another relationship, this time with Denver, an architect of 41. Denver came only during the weekends and for the rest of the week he stayed with his family at Starberry. *"When he came to stay with us, he promised to buy me a pair of expensive basket-ball shoes but then as he kept using delaying tactics. I soon discovered that it was only a vague promise, as if he was trying to buy my affection,"* he declared. For him, Denver or anyone else would not be able to replace his father. Dorina felt helpless but she needed the support from Denver to get the household running. She was aware that Byron was now slowly drifting away from the house. For Byron, his solace came from his school friends, the same ones that he had refused to let in his life earlier on. Denver did not exist for him, and he would not even use the things that Denver bought him. Dorina sensed that animosity between Byron and Denver and so during the school holidays, Byron would be sent to stay either with Christiane in Pink-Bell, or with Dick, Dorina's brother, in D'Epinay or to Dorina's mother's house. *"I did not understand why my mother sent me away to her family only but never at Jacintha's place. There at least I would have someone to confide in and George would be there as a protector,"* he confided. He felt that his school problems were no longer a priority for Dorina or anyone else. If only he could get Jacintha's and George's support, but he was not allowed to have any contact with them. Byron felt a pinch of sadness as his life had evolved from that of a close-knit family in Pink-Bell to one where each one is on his own in Pleasure-Land. He sneered when he heard Denver, Dorina and Gloria conversing in French. He was used to his Creole language as he could not express himself in French, and he felt that little by little, the difference in language and way of living between his family and him was increasing. His inability to shift from Creole to French or English made his schooling experiences more difficult as even in class, when he heard the other children responding to the teacher in French or English,

he felt left out. Having no one to share his feelings, not even Jacintha and George, he became an introvert but nurtured a lot of violence in him. *“Every day I dream of the moment where I would be allowed to go back to Pink-Bell. If only I could meet a beneficent magician in my dreams, but I have stopped believing in miracles,”* he declared, deceived.

4.3.3.4 *The transformation*

Deprived of family love, Byron turned to his friends. Those whom he had rejected when he was young at school because they would put him in trouble, now became his world. *“We are now always together both at school and at home. We go to school together and we come back together. We have the same problems to learn in school and we have the same difficulties to understand the lessons,”* he finally admitted. Stanton School was close to his house and that meant that all the children of the region went to the same school. However, Byron soon realised that the children of those parents who were economically better off were not sent to Stanton Primary School. *“That’s why Denver had used his contacts to get Tom in a primary school at Rose-Mountain. It was because my school was a ZEP¹⁹ school, a school for the poor and the less fortunate,”* he sadly stated with a touch of resentment. At that time he did not know what ZEP meant. He only knew that all his friends came from poor families.

His home had become a temporary rest place where after school he would come back, eat and bathe before meeting his friends at Drum-Line Gymnasium. *“As long as I was getting my food and a sleeping place, I was content with this life,”* he said. Moreover, the basket-ball ground was becoming a place where he could express his feelings. Every single event was a means to dissociate himself from his home and family. When at times the basket-ball game started to get rough, they would easily start a fight despite the presence of other people. At the gymnasium, Byron noticed that there was another group of adolescents who were more influential than his group of school friends. He believed that by hanging around with them, he would feel accepted by the group. *“I*

¹⁹ A ZEP school (Zone of Educational Priority) is a school where special attention is given to the students and the community because it is situated in a region of poverty and because the CPE passes for the last three years were below 40% (ODEROI, 2008)

started following them everywhere, at the gym or at LuLu's supermarket, at times sitting on the walls of Old-Man residential area, teasing the passers-by," he claimed. He felt that he was opening up as a chrysalis and day-by-day he was discovering the world by being with a group of people who were influential in the region.

When his friends Mastan, Nelson or Jonathan would bring a cannabis cigarette, he would also join in. During school holidays, when everyone was at work, he followed them to Jonathan's place, smoking and watching films, sometimes illicit ones. However, when he saw his friends consuming alcohol, he abstained from it. *"I still remember that in one way or the other, alcohol had contributed to my father's death,"* he whispered, as memories of Eric rushed back to him. Even though his new friends advised him not to get addicted to cigarettes or cannabis, it was difficult when you were among friends to abstain from it. Despite his stammer, he was accepted as one of them, he belonged to them. In school, he had become more popular with his school mates because of his appurtenance to Mastan's group. He remembered how Marina, Dorina's mother, used to preach to him to be a good boy and to concentrate on his studies to become someone in life. Marina was the only one after Eric's death to guide him towards living a healthy life and to work hard to succeed, and he would listen to her advice. Though at the beginning of his stay at Pink-Bell he tried to put into practice what Marina had taught him as values, he now felt that he could no longer follow Marina's advice at the risk of losing his new friends. *"I no longer meet members of my family, not even Marina. We are no longer in touch anymore,"* he declared. The values of the grandmother were soon unlearned.

4.3.3.5 *The birth of the moth*

After his failure at the Primary School Leaving certificate, Byron ended up in the prevocational classes at Black-Wood College. Those who succeeded were in the normal stream where they followed the traditional curriculum until their School Certificate or

their Higher School Certificate. Those who failed, like him and his school friends, followed a four-year vocational curriculum, until they were 16²⁰.

Byron's first days at his new school were happy days. *"I was happy to see myself in my new school uniform, happy to travel freely to my new college by bus, but also I was happy to be with my primary school classmates again,"* he admitted. They had failed also. But when he reached the school gates, he saw other grown up children who were teasing and bullying those who had just joined. Byron realised that learners who succeed their end-of-year primary examination and those who fail go the same secondary institution and those who succeed stay for a longer time in college. But he had come to this college to learn and wished he could learn how to become a cook, though he was not sure if he could achieve his ambitions. However, Byron's joy was short-lived as he soon discovered that mainstream and prevocational children did not get along well in a state secondary school. *"Every day there were clashes and fights between us and the normal stream learners. But the prevocational children were always the ones who were accused, rightly or wrongly, of misbehaviour,"* he grumbled. He could feel that both teachers and normal stream learners viewed the presence of prevocational learners as a nuisance and he soon noticed that their absence from the school grounds was most welcomed by staff and main stream learners.

Hence, he and his school friends would skip classes to hide in the nearby bushes. He still remembers these days. *"Very often we waited for the beginning of the first morning break to hide in the tall grasses of the football field and by the time the break ended, we would crawl through the grass, tie chains to the fencing on the wall, jump over and hide in the bushes until afternoon,"* he remembered. They took along their lunch-box and had a nice picnic. No one noticed their absences and his classmates would never give away their whereabouts. Whenever he was expelled from school, he would wait eagerly when he could come back and enjoy the company of his friends and together

²⁰ At the end of the Certificate of Primary Education, children who are successful are channelled through the normal education system while those who fail are channelled through the prevocational sector. Both sets of children attend the same secondary school but with a different curriculum that will allow the prevocational students after four years to join the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD) to pursue vocational training or to leave and join the work force.

they would prepare the next “coup”. *“When I was expelled I missed my school friends, but luckily I had my basket-ball friends around and we hung around the whole day together,”* he recalled. He would come back late at night as he knew that Dorina would not be back from work till late at night. From the chrysalis, a new being was growing up fast.

Byron soon discovered that secondary schooling was no different from primary schooling and that it was a mere repetition of what he hated in primary school; the subjects, and the teachers’ attitudes had not changed. He retaliated against these attitudes with more violence and his anger was targeted against learners who were in the normal stream because they seemed to target only the prevocational learners. *“Each time that they targeted me or my friends, I would defend them from the injustices committed against them. Once I was standing in the queue for the morning assembly and I was slapped by a learner from the normal stream. I hit back but only I was punished. At another time when I and my classmates pulled the leg of a form 5 (Grade 11) learner from the normal stream, it again ended in a fight with drastic consequences,”* he remembered. He realised that all the children in the prevocational sections were unjustly victims and wondered whether it was because they had not succeeded in their studies or because of some other reasons that he did not know?

By the end of his second year of college, he had already accumulated three suspensions from school for bullying and fighting against the normal stream learners. He had become a danger for the school, and though his classmates were also involved in the fight, he was the only one called at the office. He recalled the last time that he went to the principal’s office, in the presence of the Dean of the prevocational section, and his Form Teacher. *“I was accused of gross misconduct and bullying. I was scared when I saw the group of people accusing me menacingly but at the same time, I was also angry because I could not say anything to defend myself,”* he recalled. He was dumbfounded when he heard all the accusations against him. Dazed, he thought of how the teachers and the principal who regularly conveyed messages of justice every morning during the assembly were imbued with injustice. He was stunned. He never thought that people who had in their hands the future of school children could be so ruthless. Now, at 16, his thoughts go to all the prevocational children coming from poor families and who were and are still discriminated against in the college by those who were more powerful.

Byron was not surprised when he was suspended for the third time. Dorina went to the school to plead his case, arguing that he was too young to stay at home for long. But he was amazed to hear from her that there had been formal judicial charges against him from the parents of the learner he and his friend had teased and beaten. Dorina was forced to remove him from school for the charges to be dropped. *“That was a disguised way for me to leave the school,”* he said disgustingly. Even though he explained to Dorina what had really happened, he received remonstrance rather than compassion. Byron was more deceived when his mother made him understand that she had lost one day’s salary at her work because she had had to call at school because of him and miss a day’s work. He heard Dorina grumbling that there was no way that he would stay at home doing nothing. Dorina was adamant that he was to join Morning-Star Knowledge Hub, the institution where his cousin Manuel was. Though he hated it at Morning-Star, he, again, had no other choice and Dorina kept a keen eye on his attendance as every month she needed the centre’s attestation for Byron to receive his orphan’s allowance.

Today, Byron who left Morning-Star almost a year ago, is out of work and waiting for his trial. But the worst for him was that he would not get a morality²¹ certificate even if he got a job in the meantime. He remembered how every day, Mr Gregory, the English teacher of the centre, would coax him to make some effort to study but that was his least concern. He had not learnt anything at Morning-Star that could help him get a job. How could he think of a job at that time when he did not know anything? *“Why did my father have to drink,”* he lamented. For him, George was luckier as he had the better share of the deal.

4.3.4 Ludivin: To be or not to be a hair-dresser

4.3.4.1 *My Family: a cobweb*

For 16-year-old Ludivin, a frail-looking Hindu girl, her school experiences were perturbed just like her family life. Born in the small village of Grassland, Ludivin was

²¹ When any person enters the world of work, he/she will be employed only if his/her judicial records are clear. This certificate when obtained is called a ‘Morality Certificate’. Employers usually do not employ a person who does not have a clear Morality Certificate.

deprived of schooling until her 10th birthday. As a growing girl, she was not allowed to attend school as she had to look after her younger brother, Rahul, born one year after her. They both lived with Kumar, her alcoholic biological father and her devoted hard-working biological mother, Shanti. Everyone knew that Shanti was the backbone of the family. *She worked only as a cleaner in a factory, but the whole family lived off her meagre salary. "As my mother was working the whole day and my father went out drinking at his sisters' place using my mother's meagre salary, I had to stay at home, do the housework as well as look after my younger brother,"* she explained.

Ludivin admires her mother as she knows that she also has not had an easy life and vows that she will never be as submissive as her. As she relives her mother's life, she relates that Shanti had two elder children born from a previous relationship: a daughter, Kumari and a son, Raj. When her previous relationship ended, she was homeless with two children to feed. She went and lived at her mother's place, where her siblings, who had broken relationships with their partners in life, lived as well.

"My grandmother, Mantee, was already living in poverty. My mother's brothers and sisters' were all living with Mantee and they all had a lot of personal problems," she explained. Therefore Shanti could not depend much on her family and that was why she went and cohabited with Kumar, thinking that her two children would get a roof over their head. But Kumar did not see it fit to allow Shanti's children from another relationship to stay in his household. Shanti was forced to leave her children in the custody of Mantee. However, Mantee was not an exemplary grandmother for Ludivin's step-brother and step-sister as the grandmother would squander their pension money on drinks and cigarettes, leaving the children with an insignificant 10 rupees for their living. Shanti and Ludmilla, her sister, would both take care of their mother, catering for her provisions. Ludivin recollects that very often she had to accompany her mother to help her buy and carry the foodstuffs for the grandmother and family. She felt sorry that her own step-family could live in such poverty. *"Kumari was very rebellious as opposed to Rahul, and for that reason she was sent to a shelter. When she was 17, she ran away from there. She started living with a young man, left him and later disappeared from my life,"* she declared, scared that in some way, she resembles her step-sister and that someday she might end up like her. Later, Raj, who was then 21, came back to live with Shanti and her new family.

4.3.4.2 *Schooling, a male priority*

At four years old, Ludivin was of age to go to school. Though she was allowed to go to a pre-primary school in the region, she hated going to class because Kumar prevented her from going to school on a regular basis. *“My father was himself uneducated and he did not agree that I went to school as I needed to look after Rahul and do the house chores while my mother went to work. My father went drinking at his sisters’ place and he would come back drunk. Then I was forced to sit down in front of him while he slept. I never had anything to eat until my mother came back from work,”* she said, sobbing. If only she had a relative staying close to her house, she could have obtained their help and maybe go to school. Sometimes she attended school once a week and at times, she could not go for a much longer period. *“My classmates were all enjoying their games and their lessons as they were regular in school. I could not have the same joy because of the rare days that I came to school I was at a loss and I simply had to watch them enjoying,”* she revealed. Neither she, nor Shanti dared disobey Kumar as they were scared of his violent nature. When she was of age to go to primary school, Kumar decided that she would not attend school but it was Rahul who should attend. It was more of an Asian tradition that boys’ education was more of a priority than the education of girls. Sadly, she never attended a primary school until the age of 10. *“Every day I would take Rahul to school and then come back home to tidy up. When my father came back from his drinking bouts, I needed to sit down quietly or at times walk on his back to give him a massage. I was not even allowed to go to the outdoor toilet on my own or to have friends to play with,”* she lamented, remembering her childhood days. *“My life was not cosy.”*

Ludivin’s life was scheduled on the whims and fancies of Kumar. As far as she remembers, she has never seen her father working. Instead, he simply made sure that Shanti got a job as a cleaner and the family had to live off her meagre wages. That was the only type of job she would get as she was also uneducated. The whole family was victim to his ill-treatment. Ludivin remembered how Kumar would use all his physical force on her mother. After he finished beating up their mother, the children were the next target. Many times they were left almost lifeless, shivering and scared. Even though they shouted for help when he beat them, there was no one nearby to come to their rescue. Ludivin still shivers when she thinks of those moments. *“My grandmother*

had always asked my mother to report the case to the police but not only was she scared to antagonise Kumar, she was scared that she might lose us,” declared Ludivin. In fact, Shanti was much traumatised when Kumari was sent to the shelter and she did not want Ludivin and Rahul to end up the same way. If the Child Protection Unit found that the parents could not look after their children or if the children were ill-treated, the children would end up in a shelter.

4.3.4.3 *Living here and there*

Moving from one house to another had become a recurrent event for Ludivin. In Grassland, her family was living in a one-bedroom house, built with corrugated iron sheets. *“There was no electricity and water in the house. We used candles. I needed to fill buckets of water from a neighbour every day. When my mother came back from work, she cooked on firewood outside the house. Rahul could never do his homework at sunset. I was lucky not to be going to school,”* she reflected, guessing how she would have done her school work. She remembered how often the house would catch fire because when they went out, they frequently forgot to put out the candle. *“That was one of the reasons why we had to change houses very often. At other times when we were still at Grassland we did not have money to pay for the rent or to buy food, and subsequently, we had to go to the neighbours’ or relatives’ place to get food and stay over for a few days.”*

One day when the family had gone out, the house at Grassland caught fire and though it was extinguished by the fire patrol, they were compelled to move to Riverlet. *“The house where we went to stay was gloomy. It was out in the woods, isolated from the rest of the world with no one around. I was cut off from the real world but that was all my parents could afford to pay,”* she lamented. Yet, the rigid conditions of living did not stop Kumar’s brutality towards his family. Ludivin realised that as she and Rahul were growing up, Shanti was taking bolder decisions. *“At every fight now, my mother would take me and Rahul to stay at her sister’s place at Greenleaf. After one or two weeks, my father would come searching for us and after several days of begging and apologies, we would go back to Riverlet,”* claimed Ludivin. Even during her new pregnancy, Shanti would dutifully shield Rahul and Ludivin from the brutal Kumar; every time moving from Riverlet to Greenland and back. But the various visits to and from Riverlet and Grassland were rather disturbing for Rahul’s studies. Ludivin felt relieved

that she was not studying. At least she did not have to bear the brunt of the teachers and classmates like Rahul was enduring. Ludivin's face reflected clearly her painful emotions as she remembered those hard and difficult moments in her life. It was the face of a girl who had borne all the ordeals of life and that nothing could hurt anymore.

Luckily, when Kumar was not there, Ludivin was able to enjoy the quietness of life. *"We were so happy when my father went out drinking, when he was not in the house. We all sat down together, we were able to talk with our mother, but when he was at home, we had to sit down in front of him,"* claimed Ludivin with a sneer.

4.3.4.4 Kayla's birth: a relief

At the age of nine, Ludivin welcomed the birth of her baby sister Kayla as a blessing. Kumar, who was then suffering from cirrhosis of the liver, did not have time to ill-treat Kayla, as he died soon after her birth. *"The death of my father came as a blessing to us. The ill-treatment that we endured was over for good. And now we could live as a family once again as Raj came back to stay with us at aunt Ludmilla's place,"* she recalled with relief. For her, that meant that she no longer had to live in dire poverty.

"Kayla was lucky as she did not endure any of the sufferings inflicted on us by Kumar. She has had access to proper education. Rahul was able to do part of his primary education, but I was denied of schooling as I had to do all the chores at home. I felt like Cinderella. I did not do too much of learning, I do not know much how to read," she said with a pinch of jealousy and sadness.

A short time after Kumar's death, Shanti's cousin looked for a companion for Shanti. As a Hindu woman with four children to feed, Shanti was considered as a vulnerable woman. Shanti was deceived when she did not receive a widow's allowance as she was not legally married to Kumar. Lewis, Shanti's new male lover, was a divorcee with three children, all older than Ludivin. Lewis's mother, Tara, was staying on the same plot of land as them. Though the house where he stayed belonged to him, it was Tara who owned the plot of land.

4.3.4.5 Dignity in poverty and illiteracy

At the age of 11, when Ludivin was living with her mother in Limeland with her companion Lewis, she was admitted to Black-Sea Primary School. While Lewis took care

of Kayla's education, it was Shanti who did all the necessary for Ludivin to go to school. *"I had mixed feelings. One part of me wanted to know what education and learning meant. The other part of me wanted to continue enjoying my late sleep and the cosy life I was having at home,"* reflected Ludivin. Lewis insisted that she joined an institution. Maybe it was because if she attended a school, her mother would perceive an orphan's allowance for herself and her brother. But even though they were receiving an allowance, it was stopped with no reason given.

Ludivin was sent directly to the sixth Standard (Grade 6) because of her age. She reflected back on her first day at school, *"I did not want to follow the classes, I did not understand what the teacher was saying, I did not even want to listen to her."* For a child who has never been to school, the subjects, lessons and learning did not make any sense. *"I hated sitting down and doing nothing one whole day. I was so angry and fed up that I left the class and went on the playfields, where I felt more at ease,"* she recalled. She felt out of place, almost an alien in this world that did not belong to her. *"When the teachers came searching for me to get me back to class, I chased them and threw stones at them,"* she added. Meanwhile in class, the other children were stealing her lunch pack. *"There, in Black-Sea School, the children were naughty. When I brought food to school, they stole my food. They were very domineering and I did not like that at all. I got angry and I vented my anger on the teachers,"* she narrated. The school was a ZEP school in a poor western part of the island where there were a lot of poor children. They received a free meal per day but for many of them it was not enough as that was maybe the only meal of the day that they would have.

Ludivin did not blame the children and instead rebelled against the system of schooling. She felt that her place was not in Black-Sea Primary School. *"One fine day I was teasing a friend, when suddenly I was beaten with a broom by a teacher. I felt humiliated and I retaliated by hitting the teacher back with the broom. The next day, I was to suffer more humiliation when the head-mistress slapped me in front of all the children in the morning assembly because of my wrongdoings of the previous day,"* she recollected *"I felt anger and humiliation again. My feelings were that I did not want to go to school. I did not want to go to that school anymore. I asked my mother to change my school. Then I was sent to Greenleaf Primary School"*. She felt she was a victim of an unjust

system as the teacher who had hit her was never queried upon while she suffered the blows of the head-mistress.

After five months of humiliation, she joined Greenleaf Primary School where her experiences with the schooling system were much better. Ludivin's priority was not to learn but to build a relationship with her classmates. *"My classmates said they would set a trap for the teacher. I said I also wanted to be part of it. They told me, they would put lizards, bird's eggs on her chair, dead lizard and birds. They told me that a name had to be put on the blackboard so I told them to put my name. So they put my name. When the teacher came in, she saw my name and she beat me. Only once I got beaten in the class,"* she recalled. But for her that meant a lot in terms of sympathy and esteem from her classmates. However, Ludivin was quite ignorant of school life.

Another time, she was punished because she defended the rights of a classmate whose phone was dismantled by another male learner. Ludivin felt that those relationships were more important than primary education and its end-of-year examination. After three months of schooling where she was building up a friendly relationship, she sat for the end-of-year examination. That was the first time she was taking part in an examination, and did not even know what it meant and what it was like. *"In the examination room, I could not even read a single line and most of the time I handed back a blank paper or a paper where I scribbled a few unintelligible drawings as I did not know how to write. How could I learn a whole curriculum of six years within three months!"* she exclaimed. For her, sitting in the examination room without moving or talking for some two hours felt like a lifetime punishment. She did not learn anything new in the repeaters' class and so the outcome was the same. But she knew that it was not the teachers' fault, *"They taught us, but I did not want to follow. I did not have the intelligence for that. I did not know anything, and I did not have the means to take private tuition."* she accepted.²² She realised that maybe if she had had the chance like

²² As from 2013, first time failures at the CPE have now the option of either repeating CPE in their primary schools or joining prevocational year I in a secondary school. While following the PVE curriculum, they are also prepared to re-sit for CPE at the end of the year.

Kayla who studied since kindergarten, she would have lived primary schooling much better.

4.3.4.6 Prevocational: A blessing

But her experiences in the prevocational classes were more exciting. *“There were new subjects in which I was able to demonstrate my talents. I felt more at ease as many of my friends from Greenleaf were in the same class, as they had failed their primary education too,”* she declared, as if she had suddenly taken a liking to schooling. In fact, that was what was happening as she was in a better state of mind to learn because all the children were starting secondary school at the same time. *“I was able to demonstrate my worth and talent in Art and Physical Education. In Art, I learnt to embroider and I became so passionate that I spent my whole holidays at home. That was very rare for me as usually I preferred to be with my friends,”* she declared. But Art was not her only passion, as she felt that Physical Education brought more gratification for her than the traditional subjects. *“I woke up at 5 in the morning, to run on the beach to prepare myself for the inter-college athletics games. I represented my college in the one thousand metre race on the track of Greenleaf stadium and I remembered the applause and support from my friends and from the spectators when I finished second in the race,”* she happily announced. This second place would bring more success in the different races that she did and even in pole vault and long jump. *“At home I have many medals, so many I cannot even count them,”* she happily declared. *“I felt on top of the world, I had a feeling that I was made to be an athlete.”* But for Ludivin, being first was better than second. Despite all her efforts, like practising yoga on the beach, everything was ruined because of her smoking and drinking. Though she was trying to quit smoking, her efforts were in vain. She used to tell her problems to the teachers in Morning-Star ADS because she felt that she had no one to confide in, but then she felt dejected when her English teachers, Mr Bell at Senior Secondary School Kat-Kolonn and Mr George from Morning-Star, remonstrated with her. *“I am fed up with that, I am fed up hearing them moralising,”* she complained. She felt she bore all the pains and aches of life when she was young, therefore how would other people be able to teach her what was wrong or right.

4.3.4.7 *Oppressed*

When she was in the second year, she was very happy when Home Economics was introduced. She wanted to learn cooking also and now she was having the opportunity to do it. She was excelling in all the subjects anyway, except English and she looked forward to a fruitful third year. But those happy moments in school were not made to last for long. *“One day, when all the learners were duly engrossed in a school project about building different types of houses for an exhibition to be held for the Open Day of the college, Irina, my friend, lost her mobile phone. I was suspected by my class teacher of having stolen the mobile. My mother came to school to explain that she just bought a mobile for me and that there was no need for me to steal someone else’s mobile. The teacher did not believe her,”* she explained in disgust. *“My lady-teacher tried to frighten me. She told me that if I had taken the telephone to tell them because there were finger-prints on that. I agreed that there were finger-prints on that phone but they were not my finger-prints. I asked her to get the authorities to check if she didn’t believe me.”* That conversation was engraved in her head because she felt deeply hurt. When the phone was found in one of the houses built for the school project, she immediately demanded that the teacher should test the finger-prints on the phone because she needed to prove her innocence. The teacher rejected her request. She was infuriated, having been wrongly accused and downtrodden in such a humiliating way. *“That was always the case when prevocational learners were concerned. I was a prevocational so that was the reason why I was accused unfairly,”* she added. Prevocational learners were marginalised children who were looked down upon by the teachers and administration. She knew that when prevocational learners were concerned, there was always a prejudice or discrimination. In fact, it was not surprising for her when the administration did not accept her justified request. The school was not prepared to accept her arrogance and give in to her requests. *“The teacher told me, that she will not ask for a check because there will be a scandal in the school. And then the senior learners of the normal stream²³ would say that the prevocational learners*

²³At the end of the Certificate of Primary Education, children who are successful are channelled through the normal stream education system while those who failed are channelled through the prevocational sector. Both sets of children attend the same secondary school but with a different curriculum that will

were robbers. But I have not done anything, how can they ask me to accept that I did it?" she retorted.

Fed up with the degrading way that she had been treated and especially taking into consideration the gossips of her friends, she decided to leave school. She realised that even though the school can be a haven for children like her to develop their talents, it was also a place where injustice was practised against the marginalised. Aware of her own character, Ludivin knew that she was going to create trouble at the school. Now she regrets her decision as she feels that she should have stayed to fight for justice, not realising that there are some voices that are always lost in the desert. Ludivin felt a huge discomfort, a malaise. Irina was her best friend in school, and suddenly she started having doubts about the notion of friendship.

4.3.4.8 *Friends do not betray*

Ludivin had her own set of criteria when it came to friendship. For her, friendship meant knowing each other's character and the reasons of becoming friends, trusting each other to share secrets, knowing that there would not be any form of gossiping. Nevertheless, Ludivin felt that she had been abandoned by her friends.

At Limeland, she turned to her friends for support as she was having problems at home. As she was new to the region, her one idea was to make friends. She was never allowed to have friends when Kumar was alive. *"I met a group of children who used to enjoy themselves at the beach till late, sometimes till two o'clock in the morning. I stayed with them several times and I started getting friendly with them,"* she declared. It was an occasion for her to have a group of friends and some enjoyment. But at the same time, both Shanti and Lewis did not want Ludivin to hang around with her friends as they were sure that they were involved in some illicit affairs. There were boys hanging around with them and very often they were seen drunk on the beach. She was reprimanded by Shanti. Subsequently, the girls, Ludivin's friends, had some issues with

allow them after four years to join the MITD to pursue a vocational training or to leave and join the work force.

the Child Protection Unit. Most of them blamed Ludivin and stopped talking to her as they felt that Ludivin's parents were the source of their problems with the authorities.

"Sheila, a young girl, three years younger than me, who used to spend all her time out with boys till late on the beach was also my friend. I felt compassion for her because she was a child living with a wicked stepmother. She was being scolded, beaten and sometimes was aggressed by both parents and that reminded me of my own childhood. But my father-in-law did not see that relationship with a good eye," she lamented. Another time, Tricia, whom she had considered as her best friend at that time, broke up with her for no apparent reason. Was she too demanding on her friends? However, she guessed that Lewis was the source to all her problems for her not to have friends. Undoubtedly, if she had to invite her friends for her birthday party, they would be from Morning-Star and only Sheila from Limeland as there was no one left who offered their friendship to her. The rest of the friends would be boys.

Ludivin also felt that she could not trust her school friends. Anyway, there was no strong bond between them as she had not known them since primary school. Her experiences with Irina had been an example. If she was to be given a chance to go back to complete her studies, she would not have wanted to have friends because they would have prevented her from studying. *"It was as if they did not want to study, they would tell me to abscond from classes to go to the bus station to have fun. Others would ask me to run away from school because there was more fun where they were going,"* she explained.

Ludivin suddenly frowned, as if she was annoyed, and then resumed her account. *"At Riverlet I had a friend, but we are no longer on speaking terms. We fought here at Morning-Star ADS. Here I feel OK, but I have already told the teachers here that the day that those two girls would come back to school I would make a commotion here."* With pain in her eyes, she remembered how those two girls had betrayed her earlier. She knew that she was capable of hurting them too, as she was furious with them.

4.3.4.9 Non-conformity

Ludivin felt extremely lonely, as she could not trust anyone, not even her friends. She wondered whether it was her friends who were the problem or was she the problem. Could the solitary childhood that she has had be held responsible for her attitude

towards Lewis, her friends, her schooling experiences, her teachers? Or was it her who could not accept conformity?

“I was not prepared to accept discipline from anyone as I suffered too much when I was young. I vowed that I would not be submissive like my mother,” she explained to justify her actions in school and towards Lewis. Though she was much better off at Lewis’ place because at least she was not living in poverty, she would not accept that he directed her life. *“Lewis needed to bother about his children and not about my family’s problems because even my mother dared not scold us. He should not impose his rules on us, just like I did not like it when the teachers imposed their rules on me,”* she added. She needed her freedom. That was why when she had a problem at home she ran to Mantee’s house where they were more liberal. Doing illicit acts, like smoking, drinking and taking drugs, were a way for her to rebel against Lewis and Shanti. Ludivin believed that Lewis was always looking for occasions to engage in a conflict with her. *“For a small thing, a simple thing that I did, he talked a lot and he swore and that annoyed me. My mother did not talk to me like that, so my step-father had no right to do so. I was often beaten when I was small, but I did not like my step-father to raise his hands on me,”* she complained. Any trivial matter could trigger a clash between the step-father and Ludivin, for example: an electric lamp not switched off, a television kept on, a housework not done, her relationship with her friends, among others. She would then drag her mother in the quarrel, and very often, she was able to get Shanti to side with her. *“My mother talked to him [Lewis] and told him that when we did something reprehensible, she would talk to us and there was no need for him to interfere in our business,”* she added. Finally it all led to blows which ended up at the Child Development Unit, where she is now under scrutiny.

4.3.4.10 *Dreaming of a future*

Reflecting back on her life, Ludivin had learnt that being born poor, brought along a lot of injustice and discomfort. *“I wish I could live like a normal person, neither rich, nor poor,”* she mumbled. That was what she was dreaming of: a life where she would be able to live happily in a family, a lay person’s life, nothing extravagant. *“I also wish I could work in a hair-salon, as hair-dresser or as waitress in a hotel. The first thing I would do is to buy a small plot of land and a house for my mother to live in. I want my own house because since a very tender age, I have stayed at other people’s house. I just*

wanted, for once, to get the feeling of living in my own house, for myself, work and look after my mother. My brothers and my sisters will work and be independent but I wish that we all stayed together,” she added. Her happiness seemed to be centred on a stable family life. But then she realised that without education she would not have a better future, *“It’s only a dream, but yet I don’t only think of making it a reality I will turn it into reality,”* she convincingly states.

Today, Ludivin is being taken care of by Morning-Star staff. They are trying to find a sponsor for her to get a course in hair-dressing, but help does not come by so easily. There is too much of pride or rather self-respect in her to ask for the help of Lewis. How can she learn to have trust again? As long as Ludivin is being followed, all that can be done to get her into earning a decent living will be done, but what will happen after she leaves the centre.!

4.4 Chapter synthesis

The narratives have shown how various events happening over time can bring disengagement in the children’s life. But it also shows the sheer determination of the participants to try to succeed despite the odds. The will to disengage is not within the participant itself but within a series of dynamics acting as forces which ‘pushes’ the child to disengage. In the next chapter I will analyse all the narratives, theme by theme in order to get a better insight into the process of disengagement and dropping out from school.

CHAPTER 5

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

5.1 Overview

For the analysis of the narratives, I started first by re-reading and coding Manuel's narrative. This was followed by a similar strategy for Pravin's narrative. I proceeded in this way because both participants shared similar life experiences and both ended up in a shelter after they had lived for ten years or more in their respective families. They both also experienced school life while they were living in their respective families. It was only when they were on the verge of sitting for their examination (for Pravin) or just after having sat for the examination (for Manuel) that they moved to the shelter. The twin-reading of both Manuel's and Pravin's narratives allowed an opportunity to better seek out comparisons and contrasts across the two stories. I then continued with Byron's and Ludivin's narratives again because of the similarity in their cases as they experienced their entire primary schooling while living with their parents. The purpose of the re-reading of the narratives was to generate recurrent codes, thus allowing the field data to speak. It was from these recurrent codes that new categories emerged.

5.2 Orientation to Chapter 5

This chapter outlines the elements that emerged from a comparative cross-case analysis of the different participants' life stories. It refines the narrated stories (captured in Chapter 4) to further levels of abstraction in the form of related and recurrent issues and themes. These recurring patterns help illustrate the relationships between the life experiences of the participants and the influence on their dropping out of the education system.

In 5.3, the first substantive section of this chapter, I explain how the narratives were analysed to generate recurring codes which were later clustered into the themes. Three broad sets of categories of life experiences are explored: in section A, Out of school experiences (5.4), and in section B, The self (5.5) and in section C, In-school experiences (5.6). While represented as discreet units, these three categories

nevertheless, may be seen as intersecting and co-influential on each other. This will be shown in section D, new insights (5.7)

In 5.4, which focus on the life experiences of the participants outside of the school context, I analyse the *relationship of the participants with their family members*.

In 5.4.2, *the roles of the friends in the life of the participants* have also been explored and also what meaning is given to friendship at this stage. The role of friends in school is explored elsewhere.

Section 5.4.3 is devoted to the analysis of the interaction between the participants and their experiences with the *neighbourhood outside of the family* and friendships structure.

I have also included a section B to explore what the participants felt about themselves. In 5.5.1, I attempt to analyse how *childhood oppression, abuse and humiliation* meted out by the relatives and school staff recurred as major features which had a significant influence on the participants' later life as adolescents. Part 5.5.2 explores the different *defence* mechanisms the participants used to compensate for their lack of self-esteem.

Section C focuses on the impact of **in-school experiences** (friends, teachers and the school curriculum) on the developing child. In 5.6.1, I engage with what *opportunities* the participants had to resist their largely oppressive contexts, and explore the consequences of these resistances. *The participants' disposition to learning* is explored in part 5.6.2 followed by *how their school friends participated or not in their learning dispositions* (5.6.3).

I also analyse separately in 5.6.4 what role the *curriculum and policy* have played in the in- and out-of-schooling experiences of the participants. This is followed in 5.11 with the *school and teachers' attitudes towards the participants*.

Section D, in 5.7, presents the *new insights* that emerged from the analysis. The chapter ends in 5.8 with a *brief summary* of what emerges as new insights about the relationship between three broad categories of influential life experiences and school dropout. The new insights from the narratives further explores the phenomenon of the study. This forms the base which I elaborate in Chapter 6, in dialogue with the existing body of

literature related to the phenomenon of this study and the temporary guiding lens that was initially set up in Chapter 2.

5.3 Thematic analysis of the narratives

The narratives represented in the previous chapter reflect a synthesis of the various data sources engaged with during the data production phase of this study. These narratives constitute what Charmaz (2000) refers to as a first level analysis of description which intersects the various data sources into a coherent story line. These narratives (as referred to in the research methodological approach in Chapter 3) are a form of co-construction between the data giver (the participant) and the data interpreter (the researcher) who repackages the data into a sequenced form of telling, which itself constitutes an argument of the factors influencing the out-of-school children's experiences. This data refinement is akin to the way in which quantitative researchers choose to organise their raw field data generated from, for example, surveys and /or interviews into the form of tables and figures, which are then subject to comparison and further analysis. Making sense of the data is a continuing process of further refinement and analysis.

I started by analysing one of the narratives, namely Manuel's narrative. An inductive and grounded approach was used to elaborate the specific recurring themes that emerged from the data set of the narrative. I used the inductive approach "to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies" (Thomas, 2003, p. 2). This approach helped me understand the meaning in the complex rich narrative data. This has been done by developing themes or categories from the raw data.

I proceeded by allowing codes to emerge from the data set. Events, happenings, incidents that were found to be identical were grouped into categories. Manuel's case was studied in depth. I chose Manuel because I was more familiar with him. I then drafted a mind-map that arranged the different categories that emerged from Manuel's narrative. The same process was carried out for Pravin's narrative. Both mind-maps were rather similar and I proceeded by trying to understand the coexistence of complex interpretations. I noticed that beyond the data set, there were other signs in the life of the OOSC that were impacting their school experiences. I needed to develop an

understanding of the happenings in the life of the participants and how they related with the process of dropping out. I noticed that the participants had a stressful life in the family but the relationship among the different family members was quite stressful too. The women, the grandmothers and the fathers all individually had different relationships with the participants. Despite the stressful relationships, were the participants willing to disengage from their studies or not? Were they helped/not helped by their classmates? This became the focus of my further examination of the data categories.

From the narratives, it appears that the participants seemed to show signs of internalising oppression after having been discriminated against and oppressed for quite a period of time. They tended to reproduce the same attitudes and behaviours that society held towards them. Furthermore, their quest for friendship seemed evident and the stories are marred with examples of how friends helped them to value/devalue themselves and to combat or not the messages sent through oppression.

The neighbourhood life in the environment is made up of families living together in order to support their members. A strong neighbourhood is one where the children and parents are supported and cared for. With such a relationship, both families and society benefit at community level. Did the participants benefit from the environment they lived in and vice-versa? When we talk of schooling, there is on one side the school policy and curriculum that the participants have experienced and on the other side the attitudes of school administrators and staff.

SECTION A

5.4 Out of school experiences

5.4.1 Relationship with the family members

The relationship between the various members of the family were diverse in the different narratives and these relationships since birth, pre-primary and primary schooling might have influenced and shaped their life experiences. I chose to try to understand the relationship with each group of the family members separately to show how the relations were different and why.

5.4.1.1 *Stressful family life*

The relationship of the participants with their family members were marred with stressful moments that they had to endure and which might have shaped their life experiences as dropouts or push-outs. Manuel witnessed as a child the atrocity of life when his uncle, with whom he was staying, was arrested by the police. When the uncle was being searched for by the police, Manuel accompanied him to his hideout, hearing the helicopters hovering over their head. Then he lived the homecoming of his uncle's corpse, killed in prison. This was followed up by the arrest of his elder uncle and of his father. As a school-going child, Manuel re-produced the violent nature of these events as being something quite normal, just because he saw some degree of adventure in this lifestyle. Manuel seemed to have been, since a young age, thrust into an adult male world, especially after living with his grandparents, mainly his notorious grandfather. However, there is a sign of regret in his reflections. He was conscious that his family had turned him into who he is; hence his words of repentance: *"I did not choose my family"*.

As a child Manuel missed the affection, love and care of his mother and father. It seems that his models were not his immediate parents, but the grandparents, whom he wanted to imitate. His life was a series of separations and the only stable moment he had was when he stayed with his grandmother after his mother's departure. Manuel also had a dislike for authority, like his family. He played hide-and-seek with the police when he went to bathe in the river, he threw rotten papayas at his teachers just because they punished him, and when he could not deal with the adults, his grandfather came to his rescue. He seemed to enjoy life as a kid when the grandmother offered him a cosy life and most probably this artificiality of family life offered to him may have made it more difficult for him when he encountered the harsher realities of life.

Was Pravin's childhood similar to Manuel's? Pravin was also deprived of his family's care, love and affection as the parents were both heavily engrossed in their work. Pravin's stressful life started when his mother left the house. He could not understand why she left, instead the feeling of abandonment was immense. But Pravin also experienced the stress of living in a house where physical abuse was common. He not only saw his mother being abused but he and his brother were also physically manhandled. Pravin most probably was dumbfounded when he saw that the father's family with whom they were living were passive onlookers of such brutality. Furthermore, Pravin also suffered from

humiliation from the father's partner and children. From his own words, "*I was treated worse than a dog*", we could feel his dismay. But he also felt that feeling of rejection, when he was sent away to his cousin's place and finally ending up in the shelter.

Byron's family life after his father's death was a nightmare. His relationship with his mother after they came to stay in the suburban area was one where trust did not prevail. Although the mother was the breadwinner for the family, Byron was more inclined to a relationship of love, caring and affection than material needs. The stress on Byron was multiple. He had to move to live in a new region, with prudish neighbours. He joined a new school but was warned not to make friends, and therefore he did not have any. His mother soon entered into a new relationship and fell pregnant, which meant a shift in affection and love towards the newly born. As a result, he started stammering and withdrew into himself. It seems that the death of his father and loss of his village home had affected him more than expected as he missed both. He suffered from both a separation and a transition in his life that had caused stressful moments for him. Byron's antagonism was also towards his sister and his mother's new concubine. He felt unwanted like Pravin, because he felt that he could no longer share his feelings with his mother and that his sister was not affected by what was happening to him.

In the case of Ludivin, her stress was permanent as long as her father was alive. Ludivin lived in extreme poverty as the narratives show. Her family lived in a remote suburban region with very few neighbours in the vicinity. The house they lived in did not have running water or electricity and she had to live by candle-light, with a risk of fire hazard at times. Her relationship with her father prevented her from attending school when she was young. It seems that the extreme poverty her family was living in was a factor which kept her away from school. The father's attitude towards his family was another important factor. He was the absolute authority and exerted all his power and authority over a submissive wife. Ludivin grew up in that environment where aggression and abuse were her normal mode of living. As long as she was living under the father's authority, she dared not go against him for fear of being aggressed. The stressful moments that Ludivin lived through might have affected her development and resulted in her being more withdrawn or even more aggressive.

There is no doubt that the participants were living under constant stress and under these conditions they did show patterns of aggression, withdrawal, irritability and

misbehaviour. Perhaps these changing patterns in their behaviour influenced them during their schooling process. It is believed that self-efficacy decreases with stressful life. The participants felt that they were not in control of the situations that they were living in, not only were they living in stressful conditions, the relationships between the family members made them to believe that they could not depend upon the family to take control on the events happening. However, it does also happen that those children who experience stressful backgrounds succeed despite the odds. It depends how the children view themselves and their relationship with others in society. Pravin and Manuel were examples of how they strove hard to please those who believed in them. Self-efficacy functions best within a collective social structure rather than an individualistic one. However, these relationships with significant others in their environment were not sustained because of their family tensions. What were these family tensions?

5.4.1.2 *The role of women*

The purposive sampling strategy never aimed to single out the mothers of the participants specifically but the mothers shared a common situation. They were all employed in menial jobs as most of them were illiterate. And yet, despite being contributors to the household's budget, they were also expected to be care-givers, cleaners, laundry women, reproducers and cooks. No wonder they did not have time to devote to their children's education. Legally, Byron's mother was denied ownership of the property on which she was living after the death of her husband as she was not legally married. She could not even claim a widower's pension grant facility. That meant that she was forced to find a job to cater for her children. The narratives show that the women in the lives of the participants were the principal bread-winners as compared to the fallacious belief that "Men" are the main bread-winners in a family. As such they were rarely at home to provide care and attention to the participants. This had the effect that women in the lives of the participants were seen not to be fulfilling the roles to which they are usually culturally assigned. It seems that the role of working-class women was more associated with the role of a family as a social unit. However, the trend to move towards family units which were more of the nuclear type projects the role of the family as an economic unit, thus the need for women to earn a living and to be more independent. This view is more privileged by middle-class families, in search of

more independence, with upward consumption patterns and upward mobility and it seems that this trend is also projected on working-class women. Within their own world of turmoil, working-class women tend to aim at more independence and economic freedom. This quest for economic independence may sometimes influence their decision to rear or not children or to end up in marriages or relationships. Is this the reason why the participants looked down on the role of the mothers at home?

Furthermore, the women were never in the position of decision makers, except for Byron's mother, after her husband's death. We know the difficulties that she encountered by taking the decision to move to the suburban area accompanied by her children. By taking such a decision, she moved closer to her family, leaving her husband's family behind. Society in Mauritius as in most Asian countries is conditioned to the idea that women, after marriage, should usually leave their family to stay with their husband's family. Reference is made to Asian countries in this study because more than half of the population are Asians and the close cultural influence is usually imbibed by Mauritian families. When we see how Pravin's mother and Manuel's mother left home, husband and children and both of them were staying with their in-laws from the father's side, we naturally infer that conflict is bound to occur in such situations between wife and mother-in-law. Is this the reason why middle-class families choose to live in nuclear families? However, this decision is also associated with economic positions and the access to resources. Living with in-laws is quite common, especially in the working-class families as these families encounter a lot of difficulty in buying a piece of land and build a house for themselves. Women have no access to resources and capabilities, which leaves them more vulnerable to poverty. In three cases the women who entered into a relationship with a male counterpart lived with the in-laws. And very often when they could no longer take it, they left the family to start another one on their own. In the case of Ludivin's mother, she was in constant conflict, having to take sides in the disputes between her daughter and second concubine but she had no choice and had to continue her life in Lewis' house as she needed to care for the children. Could this be the reason why the participants had a low opinion of their mothers?

Despite the important roles that they had to play in the home, many of these women were poorly considered by their husband or by their husband's family and the participants. The mothers were mostly considered as villains or not powerful role models

for their children. Probably this is due to the traditional roles assigned to women at birth. Boys are assigned errand duties, outdoor tasks whereas girls are assigned household duties. This is quite true in working-class families and that was why Lewis did not see with a good eye the escapades of Ludivin, especially at night. The male participants expected their mothers to fulfil their traditional roles, that of caring, cooking, doing the laundry and so on. That was why Byron expected his mother to wash his school uniforms and most probably he did not consider it as his task to wash his own uniform. That was also probably the reason why Ludivin had to attend to house duties while her brother went to school. Women in the narratives were unprepared to assume men's responsibilities and became more vulnerable to socioeconomic changes. These in turn created a feminisation of poverty leaving women poorer and poorer in Mauritian working-class families. Since the time of the introduction of the Export Processing Zones (EPZs) in Mauritius, it was felt that women were now empowered through the feminisation of employment. The EPZs employed mostly women to do women's jobs in the textile and garment factories. Women were preferred to men because of their docility, dexterity and because they accepted lower wages. However, women commuted back to their homes after their hard daily labour to attend to their household duties, and they rarely received help from their husbands. Hence, women have never been empowered even though they held a job. But with the delocalisation process of the textile industries in search of cheap labour, women became jobless overnight and it was not easy for them to get a job in other sectors due to their illiteracy. Hence, for the participants, the women in their lives did not represent an element of support and success and therefore were not considered as their role model. They felt that the women did not have the capabilities to succeed in life, despite being the home bread-winners. It may be because the women were submissive and were, themselves, "dropouts" (having left the house), they were not worth copying. It appears also that the belief that women's role is to serve '*man*' and the household in general had an impact on how the participants viewed the women in their lives. The women's influence in the schooling of their children was therefore seen by the participants as being worthless or insignificant.

The other women in the narratives were all relatives who helped care for the children. Pravin's aunt was a perfect replacement for his mother's absence as she was a carer, a confidant. She even helped him in his studies. However, the women were not decision

makers. But it seems that the most important among all were the grandmothers' influences on the lives of the participants. The grandmothers' contributions are discussed in the next subsection.

5.4.1.3 *Relationship with the matriarchs*

In all four narratives, the presence of the grandmothers influenced the life and experiences of the participants. Manuel had lived with his grandmother from the time he came to stay at Star-Fruit in his grandfather's house. In the absence of his father and mother who were working, he was nurtured by the grandmother until the birth of his sister. Even when his father went to prison, it was the mother and the grandmother who looked after him, his education and his childhood company. Even when his mother left, the grandmother took care of him and his sister, and they grew up as a family at her place. All the grandmothers in the narratives were landowners and as such they were hosting the other members of the family. Most probably that was the reason why they were able to exercise greater agency. They were the members with almost complete authority in the absence of the grandfathers. The grandmothers had their sons and their brides living with them while very often, their female siblings left the house, as in the case of Ludivin's mother. For the participants, the grandmothers were the decision-makers and the ones who perpetuated the family traditions. In the absence of the parents, they ruled the household and provided not only care and affection to the participants but also exerted greater control over family decisions while the mothers believed that working, being employed, paying the bills and providing the necessary resources to their children were by themselves an act of love. However, it appeared that the grandmothers were providing love in a different way, through the purchase of Christmas gifts, by preparing breakfasts and lunch boxes for the participants, taking them to the seaside or to church. All these were considered acts of love. The participants benefitted from what is called an intergenerational home, i.e. a place where several generations of the family live. This is especially visible among the working-class families due to their inability to own land due to their economic situation. Thus, living in intergenerational homes has both a cultural and an economic connotation in rural areas and among working-class families. However, the participants very often felt unloved, despite the affection they received from the grandparents. What type of love did they really want? Most probably, the participants wanted to receive the type of

attention that their middle-class counterparts were receiving: to be taken to school, to have their lunch-box prepared, to have a responsive ear to listen to their school problems. The mother's love represented attention and care while the grandmothers' love was more associated with resources and authority.

But how was property ownership acquired? The grandparents usually are able to become owners towards the end of their lives and their own children thus enjoy this facility to build their own houses on the same piece of land, owned by their parents. Hence, the surviving grandparent becomes the legal owner of the land. This is seen in the case of at least three participants in the study. Because of their position in the social hierarchy of the family, the matriarchs were the head of family, in the absence of the grandfathers. Very often the sons of the matriarchs are the ones who would take over ownership of the land after the death of the grandparents. The study showed how Manuel, Pravin's elder brother and Byron's elder brother were shielded by the grandmothers to the detriment of the other siblings. It may be that this situation prevails because of the types of relationships that working-class couples have, especially through cohabitation. Couples who cohabit are not entitled to the resources of the deceased spouse as the case of Byron's father shows. Women who cohabit in a working-class family are seen as taking advantage of the male counterparts by bearing him a child to have access to his "wealth". Very often matriarchs are alert to such possibilities. Does that explain why the mother of Byron, the mother of Manuel and that of Pravin leave the family house? It seems that there is an economic root to dropping out just as it does have a link with poverty; one sign of poverty for the working-class being no property ownership.

The male participants seemed to be more comfortable in their relationship with the grandmothers than with their mothers. They found comfort, care, affection and a family life that they were not getting from their mothers due to their changing roles. The support that the children received during their early childhood years was based on the grandmothers' constant presence in their lives. They provided love, care and the passing on of values to them. The attachment is so powerful that the participants were prepared to accept the decisions taken by the matriarchs and were deeply affected by their eventual death. The participants were even prepared to make a radical rethinking over them. For Manuel, when the grandmother died, his whole life was upset and instead of going back to his mother, as his sister did, he chose to become a street child. Pravin

blamed his mother for not coming to visit him in the shelter but excused the grandmother. He even paid his respect to her when she died by attending the funeral rites in the village although he was still in the shelter.

However, there is a feeling that Manuel's grandmother 'owed' that love and affection to the children at her place, not only to Manuel and the sister but also to the children of her daughter. It was as if she felt that she could not provide the same care and attention to her own children (Manuel's father and uncles), most probably because at that time she might have been under the authority of a matriarch or patriarch. Even Ludivin, who was deprived of the pleasure of living with her grandmother, sought comfort from the latter when she was having problems with her mother's partner.

Ludivin's grandmother was staying on her own, together with her siblings who had had diverse experiences in life. Ludivin's step-brother and step-sister stayed with the grandmother as Ludivin's father did not want them under his roof. But when Ludivin started having problems with her mother's concubine, it was at the grandmother's house that she went seeking refuge and support. However, there she learnt to drink and smoke and she blamed her mother for "allowing" her to go there. And yet, she knew in what conditions they were living as she used to accompany her mother to take some foodstuff to them. Ludivin seemed to blackmail her mother into siding with her rather than siding with Uncle Lewis. Her aim was to use different tactics to bypass the different 'rules and discipline' imposed by the mother's concubine. When she claimed that those rules and discipline did not apply to her brothers or to Uncle Lewis' children, we wonder whether that was because she was a girl and that the rules were made just for her.

The life of the young mothers in the study was not an easy one. They were all living with the husband's family and for them, it was like marrying into a new "civilisation", with its own laws and ways of doing things. The women in the narratives were poor, uneducated, except Manuel's and Byron's mothers. As such, they were employed as cheap labour and very often worked for long hours. All four mothers were able to leave the generational home at the expense of depending on partners to provide for the children's needs. At home, the women were at the mercy of husbands, mistresses or matriarchs or at work, of the boss. Added to that, they were also seen as villains by the participants for not fulfilling their traditional roles. The matriarchs were considered as

heroines; they were the surrogate parents providing support, care, affection, being arbitrators, instilling family traditions to their grandchildren.

The participants experienced a generational conflict during their school life. They were caught between the so-defined “villains” (mothers) and the elevated “heroines” (grandmothers). Understandably, their affection was more towards the grandmothers, and they tended to copy the siblings of the matriarchs. However, the matriarchs created an artificial family cocoon to the participants, a world that was quite far from the real life. The fathers were all illiterate and yet they were seen by the participants as models, even if the latter were left to fend for themselves. The study showed that the children spent less time with their parents and had ample time in which they could create their own activities to occupy themselves. Parents did not have time to look after their children’s schooling and allowed the children to be at the mercy of the professionals: the teachers. And yet, the male participants were more inclined to resemble their fathers.

5.4.1.4 *Male dominance in society*

The narratives show that the male figures were quite dominant at times showing their power and authority over the female figures. The men needed to control and gain power as much as they could and in so doing, they ‘stole away’ control and power from women. The reason for the need to control women may be seen from the point of view of women. Women depend on men for security purposes, to bear children and to be taken care of. As such, women give up a lot of their freedom. That is the result of how they have been brought up as children. When women work, men fear that they may be supplanted and lose their power. Having power and influence was more important to them than the women’s happiness. Manuel’s father who spent most of his time in prison, used his authoritarian presence in the life of his son, and the mother usually pulled back to allow space for her husband. But when her husband was in prison, Manuel’s mother took over the education of her son with rigour. She was imitated in this endeavour by the husband’s mother. However, when her husband was around, she purposely stepped back and for Manuel, this was ideal as he knew that his father was more lenient. Manuel who was living under the umbrella of his father’s notorious family seemed even to enjoy the status and privilege that manhood offered. Since the early age of 4 he was teasing

and harassing the girls in the pre-primary school by breaking their doll house. No wonder he claimed at the age of 7:

“Because anyway I was a boy and I wore long shirts to cover myself. There was no need for a MAN to be ashamed.”

This male authority is present in both Pravin’s and Ludivin’s narratives. Despite the fact that the percentage of women in Mauritius is above 51%, the country still has a strong male influence, politically and economically. This dominance is very often reflected in the households. This is also quite true in working-class families as very often conflicts are settled by physical violence and abuse, and very often women and children are victims of these abuses.

And what can be deduced about the other men’s “attitudes”? As they were living in an extended family, the uncles seemed to have no say in their brother’s (Pravin’s father’s) affairs. As uncles of the children, they were supposed to intervene when the children were ill-treated, and yet they never helped Pravin’s mother or her children. The only time they interfered was when the children retaliated against the father’s abuse. Hence, the participants imitated the ones who were in power. Within the household, it was the grandmothers who held power and in public spaces, it was the men who were in power. That was why the male participants also tried to solve their problems in school by using power as they were helpless at home. However, the school being a compliant institution, they were punished for not abiding by the rules to the point of being pushed out of school. Byron and Pravin were not in authority at home and therefore they exerted that authority in school, by throwing parties or by attacking other children and even staff members as in the case of Manuel.

Ludivin’s father’s duty was to provide his family with the daily bread as he was expected to, or provide security for his family. However, we do not know the circumstances why the father was out of work. Ludivin’s stepfather was the perfect example of a breadwinner for his family. But he singled out Ludivin to impose his rules and discipline just because she vowed not to be submissive as her mother had been. Most probably he either needed to show his authority to his children and stepchildren or he hated to be challenged in his role by a girl.

All tend to lead to the fact that the Mauritian society is a male-dominated one where the traditional gendered dichotomy still exists despite the changing dynamics of family and the changing roles of MEN in society. Furthermore, the male participants tend to perpetuate this tradition of seeing their fathers as heroes and role models that they need to follow. The male participants preferred to have their male counterparts as their role model rather than the women in their lives. This therefore contributes to the elevation of the male figures and the downgrading of the female actors in the narratives. This explains the oppressive exploitation of women, accompanied by alcoholic behaviours, for example, violence often resulting in a stay in jail. The male figures also showed little care and compassion for family life and a lack of values and respect for their fellow human being. However, in some cases the males' attitudes in the narratives revealed that they were quite compassionate and caring, like the shopkeeper in Pravin's narrative or the father of Manuel's friends. Generally, even though this kind of behaviour is often seen in working-class families, it does also exist in the other social classes. The attitudes of working-class males, in society and in school also tend to show how the difference in class can inflate the prejudice that the middle class have towards working-class children. This will be taken up later in the subsection 5.6 on schooling. However, the question that needs to be answered is, what has been the contribution of their friends in their experiences?

5.4.2 Peers' contribution

There is evidence in the narratives that the participants' peers also influenced the experiences of some of the participants. In some cases, the internalised oppression suffered by an individual is also transmitted in a group, especially through and with friends. Although the participants showed varied dispositions to learning, the contribution or not of their friends was not negligible. Manuel's rich friends were those who kept motivating him and convinced the teacher to help him. When they were promoted to higher classes, Manuel was left with his "vagabond friends" whose priorities were to disturb the class. Manuel's rich friends were from middle-class families and they were being groomed by their parents. The father of one of his friends even realised that Manuel had the potential of becoming a useful member of the police force. His vagabond friends were from the working-class families, most probably with their own life experiences. When friends valued him, he happened to see that he was worthy and

capable and he realised that he could improve in his studies. However, when he repeated his class, he lost those friends who had moved to secondary school. The ‘vagabonds’ meanwhile were those who were like him, always ready to be tricky in school and to disturb and disrupt the normal flow and programme of learning. Caught between the two, he experienced the two sides of the coin and became more mature. At the same time, he was being coaxed at home by his grandmother and those two positive aspects of life seemed to give him a new impetus to life.

When he was sent to the shelter, his latest group of “friends” became his “followers”. He owed them allegiance and protection. When he claimed that he wanted to rent a house to take his friends ‘on-board’ because he did not want to be alone in life, it gave the impression that he wanted his ‘gang’ to live together to be defiant towards authorities, just like he was during his early childhood with friends from the uncle’s place. The new group of friends again re-valorised him and what he needed was people who would believe in him, like his grandmother. Manuel seemed to respond positively, especially in class, when he was valorised and he was shown that he was capable of achieving.

Pravin was caught between the teachers’ expectations as they were aware of his capabilities and the backbenchers of his class. He had no other choices as he needed to depend on their support to face his family problems. For Pravin, friendship had a different meaning. His friends in school were all from the same environment, as in a rural area most children attend the regional school. His friends were a real support in life as well as being disturbers in certain classes. He, who wanted to heed his aunt’s advice to behave in class and to do well in his studies, was tempted by his friends to join the backbencher’s group, although the teacher seated him in front, because of his ability. Like all children in villages, they were often together to go to the beach or play football. However, his friends did not have much influence on his private life as such. He was mostly solitary, wanting to be left alone with his problems. Even in the shelter, he was mostly lonely, especially after his brother, his protector, left. He saw his “friends” at the shelter as potential spies who would report him whenever they had the occasion to do it. Pravin felt unloved. Yet he had shown possibilities of resisting downgrading himself to being a backbencher but since he was deprived of love and affection and felt unworthy, he needed to have followers for him to get a sense of valorisation in life. The

choice between schooling priorities and the valorisation friendship brought him was determinant during his schooling process and he chose the latter.

Byron had different experiences with the friends in his life. At first, when he was transferred to Stanton Primary School, he did not want to have friends because he was scared he would be pulled into a fight. He was taught that friends were sources of problems and it was better to avoid them. Later in class, he found it better to join the backbenchers whom he thought were closer to his aspirations. He also joined them because of his family problems. Byron was under the protection of his elder brother when he was at Pink-Bell but he was now on his own in school. However, with the tensions in his home, he felt that he needed to be supported. He sought this support from the children in school and afterwards from the children in his region. Byron was more of a follower and as such he needed to get admitted to the groups. He was prepared to go out of his way to be accepted such as doing illegal things like taking drugs, running away from school and watching illicit films. He soon followed the group's pattern of life, teasing people and fighting in public. In school he followed their choice of becoming a backbencher because alone he had no identity as such. His handicap in oral communication due to his stammering was also determining in his choice of friends. He was so committed to his group of friends that he was prepared to defend them when they were in trouble in prevocational school. Friendship was important to him in his quest for company and the attention that he did not get at home. This explained why later in life he was ready (or forced) to accept charges when his group of friends stole a car. Although friends did have a supporting effect, they sometimes had negative influences on the participants. These negative influences could be possible markers that influenced their decision to drop out or being pushed out.

Ludivin's friendship experiences were also different as she found it difficult to make friends, especially with the girls. Most probably, the upbringing of Ludivin may have something to do with those difficulties. Her friendship would be based on a strong sense of loyalty and trust from children of her age. She, who was severed from friends for years, was however prepared to make concessions, even if it meant alienating her parents.

“I met a group of children who usually enjoyed themselves at the beach till late, sometimes till two o’clock in the morning. I stayed with them several times and I started getting friendly with them. But my parents did not agree.”

She was even prepared to do illegal things such as smoking, drinking and taking drugs to be with her friends. But to her surprise, she was often rejected by them for no apparent reason. Ludivin was in search of loyal friendship from young people of her age, children whom she could trust. Her criteria for friendship were:

“Friendship meant knowing each other’s character and the reasons of becoming friends, trusting each other to share secrets, knowing that there would not be any form of gossiping.”

Was she too demanding or maybe she did not realise that such type of loyalty takes time to build. Even in school she would protect her friends only to see that the friends would betray her afterwards. Although her school friends encouraged her to skip classes, she refused to do so because she realised that she was learning something in school that would benefit her in the future.

The participants’ experiences with friends showed variations of how friends contributed or not to the learning dispositions of the participants. Manuel needed his friends to learn to make choices in life. Pravin needed the support of his friends to alleviate his stressful family life. Byron was in quest of protection and Ludivin was searching for loyalty and fidelity, friends who would share the same values. That brings us to question what friendship brought to the life of the participants. Is it the fact that the participants were already stressed and oppressed that friends added other values such as protection, leadership qualities and support in school? Or were friends a sort of defence mechanism that replaced the support missing from parents? Even though the school is a place where socialisation takes place, working-class children who are oppressed and stressed may have other views of how to “use” friends to make their life worth living. Manuel and Ludivin were able to sift from the priorities in their life, despite the home conditions. Byron’s and Pravin’s family problems were their priority and their friends were not interested in their educational pursuit. It could be that the type of rearing and grooming that they had makes that working-class and middle-class children’s developments are different in that they diverge in the strategies of life that they choose. Hence, although

through friends the school is a place of socialisation, individuals choose the type of strategies they practice depending on their needs.

5.4.3 Experiences with the neighbourhood.

Children benefit a lot from the neighbourhood in which they live, just like the neighbourhood also benefits from its members. The participants lived in an environment that helped them meet their needs. Hence, both the participants and the environment needed to develop a sense of belonging or appurtenance together. But how far did the participants contribute to the community and vice-versa? Manuel was able to draw a lot from the environment where he stayed for most of his schooling time. It was a middle-class suburb with all the facilities and resources that a town should have. He used the facilities offered by the community-centre where boxing classes were available. He also benefitted from a safe school environment which was attended by children from all social classes and creeds of life. However, he did not have much of a neighbourhood relationship, most probably because of the grandparent's notoriety. It was as if he or his grandparents isolated themselves from neighbourhood life or vice-versa. Although there were neighbours all around him, he never communicated with them.

Manuel was brought up in total isolation from his neighbourhood. When the mother left to go back to her village, Manuel shifted to Rose-Mountain but he was still going to school in Star-Fruit, where he spent most of his time with his friends and their parents. The individualistic nature within the neighbourhood was clearly shown at the death of his grandmother. Manuel spent quite some time to get help from the neighbours to attend to his dying grandmother. Access to health services was also quite difficult. He was transferred to the shelter in Bromwich-West, which is situated in a peripheral region of middle-class residential areas. The neighbourhood did not see with a good eye the presence of the shelter children in that area. Even though children from the shelter were not allowed to leave the shelter, Manuel and his friends were very often involved in community life, shopping or enjoying the nearby seaside facilities. The institution was also a day-care informal school for children who were out of school. Most of the children who attended were from disadvantaged families, and very often dropouts from formal schooling. With his stature, Manuel and his friends were considered as a threat to safety in the region. They were therefore not appreciated by the people in the environment.

The epic detail of Manuel's fight with a boy in the region is a typical example of the community's relationship with the children in the shelter.

Pravin came from a village in the southern part of the island. Village life was completely different from suburban or urban life. The region had all the facilities such as school, football ground, supermarkets and dispensaries. He was from an extended family where all family members lived within a communal residential space. However, even though the community members knew of Pravin's and his mother's hardships, no one intervened to put an end to the trauma that they endured except the shopkeeper and the teachers in Pravin's school who were also aware of his difficulties and they did help. The shopkeeper offered Pravin a breathing space in his shop while at the same time lavishing him with useful advice. The intervention of the Chinese shopkeeper showed the cultural solidarity that exists in rural regions, while other members of his own religion did not deem it fit to intervene or help. It seems that there is a taboo that exists when there were some wrongdoing between neighbours. It seemed as if everyone in the neighbourhood was aware of certain events but they felt unconcerned. This feeling of indifference is less in rural areas and more pronounced in suburban and urban regions. That was why the participants turned more towards their friends rather than adults and eventually, they retreated to a more reserved and solitary life, for example, Pravin and Byron. Very often in such cases the children fall prey to the use of illicit substances and end up as addicts.

The experience of Byron in the village and the suburban region shows the difference in the solidarity that exists usually in the village among neighbours as compared to the suburban region. The participants were connected with other members of the society. However, the village lacked certain resources as Byron's mother had to go to Perly to purchase clothes for the children. This contrasted largely with life in the suburb when his mother shifted to Pleasure-Land where neighbourhood life was very individualistic. This shows that in the region disadvantaged people and non-disadvantaged people cohabit but do not mix. They do not share the same resources, such as the gymnasium, the shopping complex and formal educational institutions. Byron's friends enjoyed the basketball facility that existed in the region but the same small gymnasium was crowded with people from the region. Resources were limited. The school in the region was a ZEP school attended mostly by children from disadvantaged families. Illicit substances were

easily accessible to children and no one bothered about the children's behaviour on the roads. Although there seemed to be a sense of community in the region, the class dichotomy was very visible between the working-class families and the middle-class families.

Ludivin was also living in a suburban region of Perly. She came from a very poor area where there was no electricity or running water resources. She did not have any neighbours or friends within access. However, whenever her family did not have food to eat, they went to some neighbours' place, which means that the neighbours knew of their ordeal. And as their house caught fire very often as they used candle lights, the neighbourhood should have been aware of the poor situation they lived in. Although the neighbours helped to accommodate them in difficult times, they never tried to find a permanent solution for the family. When the family moved to Black-Sea, a coastal region, Ludivin made friends with the children in the region and she used to stay out till late at the beach with her group of friends. Although they stayed in a tourist area,²⁴ there were parts of the outskirts of the region where the less fortunate stayed. These areas did not benefit of the same facilities and resources that the more fortunate could access. When Ludivin narrated how the children in the school stole her bread in class, one could guess how poor the children in the region were.

The participants had had diverse relationships with their neighbourhood but it seemed that neighbourhood life was much more collective in rural regions than in suburban regions. There was more of a sense of community life in the rural regions. This sense of indifference often brought along a sense of non-belonging as they felt as if they were not influential partners of the community. The reason was that most probably all those living in a community did not have equal rights and therefore some did not have access to an equitable allocation of resources that would have privileged a better quality of life for all its members. Decisions are taken by those from a higher class as their members tend to occupy positions in authority. As the values of the middle class and the working-class clash, it is usually the one who is in authority that imposes its views and values and

²⁴Regions where there are hotels and accommodation meant for tourists

expects members of the lower class to comply with its set of values. This is why children of working-class parents feel left out of community life. In the rural areas, most of the members of the community are of the same social class and therefore they can afford to comply with their own sets of values. Furthermore, in rural areas more families are extended and therefore the traditions are set very often by the grandparents. Pravin's grandmother could not accept that a child raised his hands against the father, for example, and therefore she took the decision to send the grandchildren to the shelter.

When the ZEP project²⁵ was implemented, one of the aims was to get the community to be more active in school decisions in order to encourage the parents, schools and sponsors to work together towards a better environment for children. However, again the setting was imbued with people in power that perpetuated the traditional system of education rather than trying to be innovative and allow space for the development of creativity of the children. Ludivin's experiences show that she preferred the subjects where she could develop her talents to the traditional subjects of schooling. We can see in the case of Byron how the entire environment blamed him for his actions and his quest for justice. Even Ludivin searched for justice when she was unjustly accused and both of them searched for a space to share their feelings but could not get it. Hence, this leads us to ask the question: how do children who suffer injustices during their schooling time seek for justice and from where will they get it? It seems that the relation of power between the working-class parents and those in authority gives the feeling that parents rarely attend school meeting with the school community because they are very often summoned to be reprimanded rather than receive praise for their children's success. Hence parents shun the school community and the participants are left on their own to face injustices and they take the decision to drop out or are subtly pushed out.

²⁵ A school project for schools whose examination results are less than 40%, spanned over a period of 5 years.

SECTION B

5.5 Experience of the self

5.5.1 Internalised oppression: Understanding of self

The participants were aware of their own stress living in their family and they were also aware of how the community imposed a set of values with which they could not comply. This section evaluates how the participants felt about themselves. The participants were living in an environment where social injustices existed and they felt that their family and they were the victims of such injustices. And they knew that such was the case because they were from the working class.

Manuel felt from an early age that his family and relatives were harassed by those in authority. He believed that when the uncle was killed in prison by his fellow prisoners, the prison authorities did not try to help save his life. That was why in the absence of his father, he was under the ‘protection’ of his grandfather and lived on his reputation, while being protected by him. It was mostly his grandfather who solved his abuse problems when he could not defend himself against those who were his elders. He learnt that:

“When the opponent was too grown up, my grandfather, himself a habitual criminal, would come to my rescue. Everything was taken care of neat and clean.”

As a result, he slowly learnt how to accept to live with the notoriety of his family. At four, he was already misbehaving in class and he claimed that he liked to misbehave. Even later in life, his life in the shelter took the full dimension of ‘living’ his family’s way of life.

“I was not the type to beg for mercy or offer an apology or whatever. You want to fight, okay. But you don’t hit me, as no one has ever put a mark on me. You’d better be prepared to accept the consequence.”

The label of being manly followed him throughout the years. Was it the reason why the shelter administrator did not allow him to pursue his studies in secondary school? However, behind that manly stature was a child who had forgotten to live his childhood. When he envisaged his life after the shelter, when he would be without a family and

friends, he felt that he had grown up too fast. Being solitary scared him and that was why he wanted to rent a house to convince his friends to stay with him. Separations were recurring incidents in his life. Feeling lonely, Manuel developed a sense of self-protection from the dangers of life. He felt that because of his stature and his parent's notoriety, society viewed him as being someone aggressive and violent and he lived with that perceived reputation to protect himself.

Pravin also had the sense of being unloved through the humiliation and ill-treatment that he received from his parents, relatives and his father's concubine. Consequently, he was convinced that no one liked him and that he was ignored by everyone. He confined himself in solitariness, where he also, like Manuel, protected his own self. For him, society in general considered him as a worthless person, despite his efforts to comply. He deliberately withdrew himself from whatever hurt him and by doing so he deliberately tried to forget (or not remember) events that had been harmful for him, events such as his mother's departure from the house. He finally convinced himself that he was worthless, that he harmed others just like he was harmed; hence he lived the life as viewed by the society he was in. Even though he received support from the shopkeeper in his village and that helped him to do away with the negative feelings he might have had, that support was not sustained over a long period of time. He was on his own to internalise his oppression. Therefore, he felt useless and not up to the standard that would allow him to reach accomplishment in life. The time he spent at school instead of being a springboard for life, became one where his lack of self-esteem prevailed.

Byron had the same issue as Pravin. His transition from the village to the suburban region, after his father's death, was too brutal for him. He was already perturbed by the loss of his father and the further separation from his home, school and family friends was too hard to bear. The transition brought him to a new environment that he considered alienating and he withdrew himself from school mates and the environment. In front of the ill-treatment he had in school, partly from his teacher, he started stammering and most probably this increased his feeling of shame in class. He felt suppressed, suddenly could no longer express his feelings because he had no say in the decisions to move from his deceased father's house. But the fact that he started

stammering also brought with it a social dimension. How does the person who stammers react in society to camouflage his impairment?

However, for Byron, the most important aspect of internalising this certitude of being oppressed was his conviction that he could not learn English. He kept repeating on every occasion that his English was bad, since the early years of pre-primary schooling. He was convinced that he “was not able to understand that language that sounds funny”.

He used that aversion to study to convince himself that his place was among the backbenchers of the classroom and all throughout his schooling he identified himself as ‘belonging to the failure group’. Byron believed that his efforts were not producing the results that he was expecting or was expected from him and like Pravin, he started doubting his abilities. He felt that his efforts had only provided him pain and disillusion and stopped from producing efforts to avoid more pain and disillusion and disappointment. He felt that he was worth nothing, either in school or at home. Most probably, he felt more valued in the company of his friends thus friends became more important than schooling. The friends had become a sort of defence mechanism against the hurt that he suffered.

Ludivin was a victim of extreme brutality and was treated worse than a servant by her father. She lived in extreme poverty, with no running water or electricity and she was not allowed to attend school. Ludivin had learnt that she needed to suppress her feelings and accept life as it was. During her childhood days, she found it difficult to make friends and always felt that her relationships with her female counterparts were never binding. When she put forward the profile of those she considered as ‘good friends’, she searched for profiles such as trust and non-gossiping but yet, felt that she was always abandoned by friends. In school, she would be the first to defend her friends but when she was in trouble her friends never came to her help, thus the feeling of abandonment. She also suffered from humiliation from the school staff and she preferred to leave school and live in isolation, just like Byron. As a result, Ludivin internalised her fear as she did not receive appropriate help when most needed. The fact of going through a life of perpetual abuse and abandonment created a feeling of shame within her and the message that she was receiving was that she was worthless and valueless.

The participants had all undergone undue stress in their life. This condition of stress was characterised by worry, frustration, sadness, withdrawal and tension. The participants were also often subject to depression. They felt worthless; they had extreme feelings of hopelessness, feelings caused by abandonment, abuse, humiliation and shame. The negative images that society posed on them had an impact on their personality traits in that they either withdrew and isolated themselves (Ludivin and Byron), or engaged in aggressive and anti-social behaviour (Manuel), feelings of humiliation (Ludivin, Pravin). Whenever children like Manuel or Pravin behave in that way in school or in society, they are labelled as 'children beyond control' and very often they end up in shelters, Rehabilitation Youth Centres (RYC) or correctional Youth Centres (CYC). Overpowered by all these disadvantages and resulting pains, Ludivin and Byron used the meanest excuse to stop schooling.

5.5.2 Using defence mechanisms

The narratives further showed how the participants were constantly using defence mechanisms towards their lack of self-esteem to which they were exposed. In fact, these mechanisms could be a determining factor that mediates in-school and out-of-school experiences. Withdrawal, forgetfulness, solitariness and jealousy were all signs of conflict between how they valued themselves in their heart and how society valued them. In fact, the participants, except Byron, had high aspirations for their future at the beginning. Manuel wanted to be a professional boxer, Pravin wanted to get married, get a good job and build his own house, Ludivin wanted to be a hair-dresser and buy a house so that her family could, at last, live together. Despite internalising their oppression, they were also able to defend themselves against low self-esteem, bereavement, aggressiveness, anxiety and anguish. Manuel was able to use omnipotence, a defence mechanism to show his superiority over others. Ludivin showed jealousy in order to get her mother's love, attention and affection against her step-father. Pravin preferred to forget harmful events by repressing thoughts that may be a source of pain and worry. Byron used self-deprecation to belittle himself in front of others in order to obtain favours, that of being accepted in groups of friends. Were the defence mechanisms sufficient to protect them from the conflicts of life? We note that in the case of Byron, the defence mechanisms have been counter-productive because it seems that they led to his being cut off from reality. But in the case of the other three participants, they

have been able to use these mechanisms to protect themselves from their anxiety, anguish and suffering. Most probably, these mechanisms have had a mediator effect between the in-school and out-of-school experiences.

SECTION C

5.6 In-school experiences

5.6.1 Opportunities

Manuel had the support of his rich friends (and their parents) when he was in school. So he had the opportunity to resist the stress that he was going through and was offered care and opportunities of self-esteem in a positive way. He also received appropriate care, proximity and comfort through his grandmother. These attentions however were too short-lived. The drastic events of losing his grandmother and soon after, his rich friends who moved on to higher studies were events that brought back his stress and loneliness.

Pravin's opportunity to resist came from the shopkeeper who took him under his care and groomed him by offering care and an opportunity to live in a more peaceful environment. The shop became his haven. Further opportunities were offered to Pravin by some of his school teachers who tried to help him when they learnt of his problems. Moreover, his aunt provided care and support to him in the absence of his parents. However, it seems that the humiliation that he went through and the feeling of insecurity linked to feeling unwanted did not allow him to resist the odds. All his supports were cut short when he was sent to the shelter.

In the case of Byron, the opportunities to resist were largely non-existent. It seems that no external helping hand came his way, neither from home, from the environment nor from the school. He did not have the ability to persevere and adapt and thus attributed his problems to others.

It might be assumed that Ludivin had the opportunity to resist the problems of life and of schooling when she joined school at the age of 10 when her father died. However, it was a bad experience for her as she could not comply with the exigencies of the school's rigidity. But then how do you expect a child who has never been to school and who is

completely illiterate to join the sixth Grade and sit for her examination within the same year. Furthermore, the conformity of a school institution was not within her set of values and she found it very hard to comply with school discipline.

But why is it difficult for working-class children to sustain their efforts in school? It may be because the participants did not engage enough in home learning activities as young learners. The home is the learner's first learning environment for cognitive development. It is claimed that the way the child is reared in relation to social class and race differs and seems to give perceived advantages to middle-class children (Tiedemann, 2005). The participants very rarely received help from their parents as far as schooling was concerned. Pravin depended on his aunt who was herself illiterate to help him do his homework. Manuel's mother who was literate rarely had the opportunity to "coach" her son due to the father's and grandmother's influence. Byron was helped at times by his mother's friend and Ludivin was allowed to discover learning on her own. However, Manuel was aware that his friends were helped by their parents, that they took private tuition and that they were "intelligent", hence that his middle-class friends were groomed by their parents. Even Pravin and Byron complained that the "others" were privileged as they were taking tuition. So, was it the way that they were reared that was an obstacle to their educational attainment? It seems also that the families' responsibilities in the participants' education was inexistent and all the responsibilities were placed squarely on the shoulders of the school and the teachers. In truth however, due to their illiteracy, precariousness and instability in their families, it was difficult for working-class parents to shoulder the responsibilities of their offspring's education. However, does the schooling system provide an alternative to working-class rearing? It seems that the policy does not take into consideration the capabilities of the working-class children who are more prone to experiencing life situations as compared to middle-class children. The school culture should therefore be queried as being deficit to suit the needs of all children.

5.6.2 Participants' learning disposition

Although the participants' families and the significant persons in their life could not sustain the young learners in their scholastic attainment, what was the participants' learning disposition? Two of the participants, namely Manuel and Pravin, seemed to work things out for themselves as learners. Manuel suffered from different setbacks and the

most prominent one was the death of the grandmother. However, he did re-focus his efforts and was finally rewarded with success in the final primary school examinations. Pravin had less determination than Manuel but the difference was that Manuel completed his final examination before being sent to the shelter while Pravin was sent to the shelter before sitting for his examination. But it also appears that Pravin was destabilised by his teacher's attitudes towards him, even though he tried hard to please him. It appears that the fact that he transited to another school resulted in conditions that curbed his will to achieve.

Byron showed early signs of discouragement since his pre-primary schooling. He believed that he lacked the capability to succeed and as such was less inclined to give his best in his studies. He therefore stopped his efforts to persevere in his enterprise.

Ludivin was disadvantaged in that she never attended primary school. However, when she did manage to be admitted to a primary school, she was just dumped in the sixth Grade with no preparation whatsoever. She did not have any prior knowledge of learning and schooling and she wondered what she was doing in such an institution. But it seems that when she was promoted to prevocational, she was very disposed to attend and did well because she knew that everyone was starting afresh. It seems that because of her class position, she could not afford to attend an institution where she could have started afresh her studies and she was forced to follow the pattern of schooling that existed.

The participants' disposition to learning varied from participant to participant. However, when we consider the difficulties the participants had to face, we could be tempted to blame poverty as the main cause for their low disposition to learning. There were nevertheless other conditions and situations which could also have contributed to the participants' inability to do well in their early schooling. It could be that the teachers' attitudes towards low SES children led to poor motivation from both teachers and learners resulting in a dull and unsatisfactory time spent at school. Other causes may be school policy, such as language learning, or as in the case of Ludivin, no intermediate programme for children who had never attended school. It might also be the types of school that they were attending that were not appealing to them. However, the lack of family involvement or the attitudes of the family might also be the reasons why there was disengagement. Pravin was severed from school for months because he refused to comply with his father's unreasonable and unfair demands and acts. There

might also be a multigenerational reason about why low SES children were not disposed towards learning, due to the parents' illiteracy. Manuel and Pravin had better dispositions to learning because of the value attached to the Primary School Leaving certificate for higher perspectives in education and to better jobs in the future. That was why they were dumbfounded when they were not allowed to join a secondary school. But what role did the peers play in the participants' learning disposition?

5.6.3 The role of friends in the participants' learning disposition.

Although the participants showed varied dispositions to learning, the contribution or not of their friends was not negligible. Manuel's rich friends were those who kept motivating him and persuaded the teacher to help him. When they were promoted to higher classes and he was not, he was left with his "vagabond friends" whose priorities were to disturb the class.

Pravin was caught between the teachers' expectations as they were aware of his capabilities and the backbenchers of his class. He had no other choice as he needed to depend on the backbencher's support so that he did not fall into loneliness. With his friends he was able to forget his family problems temporarily.

Byron was taught by his parents that friends were sources of problems and it was better to avoid them. Later in class, he found it better to join the backbenchers whom he thought were closer to his aspirations. He also joined them because he felt that he was rejected by his other classmates because of his stammering. He was lonely and needed their company in order not to fall into loneliness.

Ludivin found it hard to have friends on whom she could depend. Although her school friends urged her to miss classes, she refused because she realised that she was learning something in school and that it would benefit her in the future.

Here also we can note the variations of how friends have contributed or not to the learning dispositions of the participants. Those with a strong mind, like Manuel and Ludivin were able to sift from the priorities in their life, despite the home conditions. Byron's and Pravin's family problems were their priority and their friends were not interested in their educational pursuit.

5.6.4 Curriculum and policy

The narratives show that the curriculum and policy practices may have had some effect on the life experiences of the participants. The schooling experiences of the participants were again different from an individualistic point of view. However, we learn through the narratives that the participants struggled with the curriculum that was imposed on them and which did not match their immediate needs and interest. For Manuel and Pravin, pre-primary and the first three years of primary schooling were fun.

Pravin also claimed that:

“My first three years of schooling were fun as I enjoyed myself a lot with my friends. There was nothing much to do in class. We were asked to sing or repeat everything that the teacher said.”

The difficulties started from Grade 4 where the preparation for the CPE (CPE) began. This change in the programme of study and the resulting difficulties were also experienced by Pravin and Byron who suddenly found that they were experiencing serious problems coping with what was expected from them. The teachers were less complacent and any breach of the ‘school code’ was not tolerated. Teachers considered the classroom as a place to study and not to have fun or socialise:

“My teacher told me to shut up and not to disturb those who wanted to study ...”

The curriculum is made in such a way that it leaves no room for the holistic development of children. It is subject centred with the ultimate aim of achieving success at the CPE. Success means that children have access to academic secondary schools (also called colleges) while those who do not succeed have access to prevocational secondary schools (PVE). However, since the colleges are not of the same standard (colleges are classified as National Colleges, Regional Colleges, Confessional Colleges), it was important for children to aim for the best, that is National Colleges and some Confessional Colleges of high reputation. The need for children to access the best secondary schools puts a lot of pressure on teachers and administrators to achieve at all cost, and very often at the detriment of the weaker learners. When Pravin intervened to tell the teacher that he could not understand, he was beaten for class disturbance. Whenever a participant claimed that he could not understand, this was treated as

insubordination and any breach of non-conformity was not tolerated. The teachers had a programme to complete and it was not possible to allocate time for late developers. The class was virtually divided between the elite (the frontbenchers) and the backbenchers. Most of the participants were more at ease in the backbencher's group. Those who lagged behind had only one solution, to take private tuition. The certificate of the primary education examination, apart from being a selective examination is an examination that also accounts for the school and teacher status. The results are highly publicised through the media and therefore the school with the best results are considered as "star schools". This also means that the said "star schools" will be in high demand for the next few years to come. Hence, it not only valorises the school but also the staff of the institutions. Was that the reason why teachers were teaching towards the examination, not allowing space for holistic development? Does that explain why some children become backbenchers? Most probably yes, and according to Pravin, Manuel and Byron, those who are able to cope with the teaching process are at an advantage. However, very often children from working-class families are those who lag behind whereas those from middle-class families are more at ease with the style of teaching and learning process. Moreover, they are the ones who can afford to pay for private tuition. Why is it so important to succeed at all cost at the CPE?

The criteria for success and failure are very rigid as they provide a solid base for employment in later life. Succeeding with flying colours at the examination guarantees access to what is considered to be a good secondary school, with a culture of producing scholarship winners (laureates) at Grade 13. Laureates obtain a fully paid scholarship to study abroad, with no obligation to come back and work in the country at the end of their course of study. And very often, the race towards these scholarships benefits children from middle-class families, because generally children from working-class families do not usually perform up to Grade 9 as the study shows. Parents find it important to aim at the laureate system because first it saves them a lot of money needed to be invested in the studies of their children and second, it is a means towards upward mobility and social status.

This urgency to attend a "good college" explains the stress for parents and students to ensure that their children make a place for themselves in the best secondary schools. This in turn increases the pressure on teachers to deliver, especially in star schools

where the parents monitor the slightest progress or non-progress of their children. Who benefits from these classifications? It is again the middle-class families who have the facilities and resources to use the system to their advantage. Middle-class parents devote a lot of time to their children. The children are encouraged to practice other activities, are accompanied every day between school, private tuition and other activities. The same parents will monitor the performances of their children, who are encouraged to query and question teachers in school. However, it seems that working-class children are not groomed the same way because of lack of resources. Working-class parents need to work hard to earn a living and therefore, they do not take full advantage of the system. These parents hardly meet teachers, and they do so only when they are convened, as in the case of Byron. That probably explains the attitudes of teachers towards children who do not conform to the classroom working atmosphere, as they feel that the parents do not feel concerned.

However, even though it is claimed by the Ministry of Education that all schools (primary and secondary) are of equal standard, there is a perception by the public at large that there is a sort of classification among the schools in Mauritius due to the fact that parents choose methodically to which school they send their children. Primary schools are classified by the authorities according to their pass rate at the CPE examination results. The primary schools, with a pass rate of less than 40% over the last five years, are tagged as ZEP schools and those above 40% are non-ZEP schools. Even non-ZEP schools are further sub-divided into star schools and non-star schools. What we can see here is that the CPE policy on education tends to classify the institutions (and maybe teachers) and because of the stratification, those with more power make it a point to access the best since it is perceived that star schools produce better results at the CPE examination. Obtaining the best results means access to star secondary schools but also the social status that goes along with it. When all the highest-ranked learners are grouped in the same school, one can guess what the final end-results at Higher School Certificate examinations are likely to be. This “rat race” may explain why middle-class children have a concerted cultivation grooming. It is claimed that concerted cultivation brings success as it opens up a child’s practical and social communicative intelligence. It seems that these children are more extroverts and find it easy to communicate with adults. On the contrary, working-class children engage in an accomplishment of natural growth where they are left on their own to attend to their social development.

However, it may be possible that some working-class children also obtain a concerted cultivation rearing and thus compete at par with the middle-class children. This would in turn be favourable for their social mobility later in life. Does that explain why the participants complained about what they considered the ‘pace’ of the teaching and learning process that did not suit them? In other words, ingestion of the lesson was slower for them as compared with the other children and they put the blame on the fact that the “others” were taking tuition or even that they were more intelligent. And how did teachers respond to the two types of children? It can be seen from the narratives how teachers tend to be more responsive to the frontbenchers rather than the backbenchers. This most probably has a repercussion on children’s motivation to learning.

Another component of the policy and curriculum concerns the language of instruction and language of examination. During the teaching and learning process, the participants were disadvantaged by the subjects being offered to them. And their main nightmare was the medium used for the acquisition of learning, English or sometimes French. The narratives show that the curriculum did not allocate space for the use of mother tongue for the development of the children from an early age (especially working-class children). The participants came from different family backgrounds and as such were not exposed to the use of French and English languages. As Manuel claimed:

“But then, how do you beat the odds, when I have never watched English films, never listened to English news, when I have slept during the English classes/tutorials?”

Byron encountered problems with English since pre-primary schooling, an age where learning through the mother tongue is advocated for foreign language development. The participants were already disadvantaged by the learning of English and French languages as they were not accustomed to the use of the languages in their everyday life. However, the curriculum was maintained despite children’s difficulties to adapt. Was the curriculum more suited to advantaged children? It seems that maintaining this language policy gives the possibility to classify learners for better access to a ‘star’ secondary school and also for employment in the public sector. The recruitment criterion for most prized posts in the public sector is that applicants should have a credit in five subjects at one and same sitting, including English, French and Mathematics. Furthermore, these subjects carry more points and are given more weighting in the

calculation of grades. Though the language policy is not necessarily a factor for dropping out, it seems that it contributes towards more marginalisation of working-class children. Although there have been contesters of the actual system of elitist education, a vast majority accommodate the policy to their needs towards social mobility. The latest education reform introduced in 2015, the nine-year schooling, makes provision for a continuous schooling system until Grade 9 but it simply replaces the term CPE by the PSAC. Although there is provision for some examination papers to be examined in Grade 5 and the rest of the papers in Grade 6, the purpose of the examination remains the same. It is still the springboard for access to secondary institutions, a selection to either academic or vocational streams and a selection to the 'best colleges' in the secondary sector. Therefore, it gives the impression that nothing has changed for disadvantaged children.

However Ludivin seemed to appreciate the prevocational sector because it gave her the possibility to explore avenues that she never explored before. She enjoyed her Physical Education classes and her embroidery classes. She was given the opportunity to shine during the sports events where she felt more capable to perform. This can be explained by the fact that she did not go through the ordeal of the CPE and that discovering new subjects that provide a more holistic possibility is a possible gain that could be considered for working-class children. She seemed to accept the fact of learning at prevocational to acquire possible skills that would help her towards employment later. Therefore, the link between CPE/secondary school/ employment is still very present in our educational system.

There is no doubt that the actual curriculum and policy in education aim to address the human capital that has brought economic success to the island of Mauritius. But it has also contributed to a perverted education system at primary level where middle-class and working-class children are not competing on equal grounds. Both sets of children already have a different upbringing which definitely provides an unfair advantage to middle-class children. The difference is further increased by a favourable set of policy and curriculum devised to favour middle-class children in terms of access to schools and language adaptability. This in turn increases the chances for middle-class children to have access to better jobs and to be positioned at the top of the middle-class system. Finally, it seems that the primary education system perpetuates class stratification,

where the middle-class citizens cater for the middle class, to the detriment of the working-class children.

5.6.5 School's attitude towards learners

Most probably, the most important theme that emerged from the narratives was the interaction between the school (staff and administrators) and the participants. Their experiences varied from school to school and in different contexts. Manuel, for example, received help from his teachers when they happened to know that his mother had left their family home and that only the grandmother looked after him. However, he received corporal punishment from the staff over time and retaliated by throwing rotten papayas at them. Pravin also received help from his teachers when they knew of his family problems. However, another teacher clashed with him in class because he explained his difficulties to understand what the teacher was explaining. These two examples showed that some teachers were compassionate at times while other teachers showed less compassion, especially when the participants exposed their incomprehension of the lessons. Are working-class children looked down upon by teachers who most probably were of the middle class? Is there a clash of values that each social class emanates? There seems to be, at first glance, a certain form of conformity to which working-class children could not adapt. This non-conformity seems to emanate from the internalisation of their oppression. They behave the way they are expected to behave. But it may also mean that teachers are not able to understand the 'world' of working-class children and the way they have been brought up. Failure to comply was met by corporal punishment, which the participants easily accepted and adapted to because this same violence was used at home. But on top of that, teachers were quick to blame working-class children because it was easier than blaming middle-class children. Middle-class children had what is considered as a good upbringing and therefore, they could comply with the conformity imposed by the education system. And therefore they were seen as being "good students". Ludivin was blamed for stealing a mobile phone and even though the phone was recovered, the teachers who accused her never excused themselves or repented for having wrongly accused her of theft. Byron was singled out as being the only aggressor even though the fights that he was forced to take part in were a group fight. Working-class children are considered by their teachers as being impolite, vulgar, aggressive and not interested in their studies. Rules and

regulations are decided and implemented by middle-class adults. There was definitely a surge of power that was used to discriminate against the working-class children who did not comply to these rules and regulations. The threat of punishment (institutional), the messages of conformity that are passed in the curriculum, the choice of the language of instruction, the control of agendas through the boards and parent's teachers associations are all forms of power exerted on children from the working-class to conform in school and society. However, the participants felt that they needed to either retaliate against such forms of power or to be submissive and accept these as normal parts of life. There is a feeling of being unwanted, shame and guilt that the participants are confronted to, so much so that they are helpless in front of such injustices. Ludivin stopped schooling for that reason. For her, the school was sustaining social inequalities to which working-class children were exposed. Byron also was a victim of such inequalities and he was made to stop schooling. Again, this reinforces the idea that schooling perpetuates a social inequality through its systemic inequity. The inequities from the system accommodate middle-class children but pushes out children from the working class.

However, teachers are also confronted with the exigencies of the curriculum. The ever-changing reforms in education put more pressure on teachers so that they are persuaded that to get children to succeed, rote learning is the quickest and best solution. The changing roles of teachers (from imparting values and knowledge to teaching towards examinations) do not allow time and space for them to reach-out to all children in class. Nevertheless, the pressure put by middle-class parents who want their children to receive quality instructions may also explain the attitude of teachers in class. Although the power exerted by middle-class parents is quite evident, teachers also use examination results to secure promotion to 'star schools' and to upgrade their social mobility. By so doing, there is a constant and methodical approach that they use to get their students to provide better results. Working-class parents will rarely question the teachers' teaching because they feel that the teacher knows best, as compared to middle-class parents. As such, teachers may have a fallacious perception that these parents do not bother about their offspring's schooling (Colarco, 2014). The participants perceived that at times the teachers were not interested in their problems of understanding and yet they (the teachers) believed that they had done everything for

the children. Again, the participants reacted differently to this lack of consideration, Manuel used violence, Byron and Pravin joined the backbenchers and Ludivin left school.

SECTION D

5.7 New insights

After the analysis of the narratives and the cross-comparison, new insights have emerged from the themes. These are summarised below.

5.7.1 Out-of-school experiences.

The children's family is an indirect influential force in the process of dropping out from primary school. The study shows that working-class families were mostly wage earners involved in low-economic jobs. At times, one job was not enough and parents had to take up another one to eke out a living, hence spending less time with their children. We note also that most of the couples (parents of the participants) lived in cohabitation outside formal marriage and that most of the mothers had two or more children outside the family they actually lived in. Even though Stephens (1998) posits that one of the domain responsible for children's dropping- out is the economical factor, this study tend to show that due to ther economic situation, children are pushed out from school ather than dropping out.

The children also lived in a male-dominated family structure, and their mother and themselves were very often abused physically and suffered violence without the other relatives' intervention. Even the neighbours, despite having a close social interaction with the family, never intervened in favour of the women or children.

The environment in which the children of this study lived could be interpreted as hostile to their presence, especially in suburban regions. The study showed that there is a mix of working-class and middle-class families living in the suburban regions. These suburban regions came to exist because of their proximity to job opportunities in the industrial zones. However, these regions have also been composed as a result of social housing

estates (Cité) created as a response to a national rehabilitation plan for the most vulnerable (United Nations Human Settlements Programme [UN-Habitat], 2012).This study reveals that while the intentions of the rehabilitation project might have been motivated by an expressed interest in establishing greater equity across divergent class groups, the effect has been to promote more divergence and antagonisms. The cohabitation of the middle-class residents and the most vulnerable groups of society reflected in the data of this study suggests that relationships across class groups within urban settings has not been as smooth as expected. This is supported by the study of Knight and Shi (1996) stating that income levels and incentives are issues that need to be considered in rural drop-outs. By contrast, such is not the case in rural areas. One possible explanation for the difference could be that urban settings were characterised by fragmented groups which disaggregated the community into separate sections, while, as suggested by the data of family interaction in rural settings, the community (as typified by the participants) tended to be more cohesive and collective. Many of the participants were relocated into rural settings as families attempted to kindle a degree of stability for their future especially when the urban environment proved unwelcoming of their positive growth. Understandably, the participants reflecting on their life experiences also suggested their preferences for these more supportive communal-like public figures and family structures.

The study also highlights the influence of the grandmothers, referred here as the matriarchs, who served as stabilisers, and more, in the life of the children and the family structure. The matriarchs' influence however overshadows the mother's importance and influence. The discussion in the next chapter will explore further how and why matriarchs exercise their role in the life experiences of OOSCs.

The study also shows that working-class children have an upbringing different from that of middle-class children, which influences their interpretation of school experiences. How this plays itself out in the Mauritian context will be elaborated in 7.3.1.1.2 and 7.3.1.1.3.

5.7.2 In-school experiences.

Even in the in-school experiences of the participants, several types of forces have a bearing on the dropping-out process.

As far as friends were concerned, the study showed a double role in the relationship with their peers. Middle-class peers tend to pull the participants into the schooling and normative middle-class social system, whereas the working-class peers tend to push out the participants through their behaviours. However, the positive peers, those that tend to pull-in working-class children, offered constant support where the family failed to. This is in contradiction with extant literature that englobes all peers in the same category whereas this study shows that there is tension between middle-class and working-class peers in relation to working-class children. May be the opinion that working-class children have about their peers within that age group creates that dichotomy.

The types of schools (ZEP schools)²⁶ attended by the children served as push-out forces not only because of the label attached to them, but also by the desertion of these schools by the most able children. However, paradoxically non-ZEP schools seemed to be more responsive to the children's needs. See discussion of this in section 6.3.1.1 in Chapter 6.

The approach of the teachers equally had an influence in the learning and teaching process as mentioned by Ercole (2009). The quality of teaching was brought forward by the OOSC children as being advantageous to middle-class children but to their detriment. The quality of teaching was brought forward by the OOSC children as being advantageous to middle-class children but to their detriment. This perception was amplified by the advent of private tuition and the children believed that it favoured those who could afford it. Discussion on this topic is extended in section 6.3.1.1.4 and 6.3.1.1.5 in Chapter 6.

The cross-case analysis of the narratives of OOSC's life experiences also revealed that the attitudes of the school staff (teachers, head, and caretakers) towards the working-class children were also factors of influence. Very often the children linked those attitudes with justice or injustice, self-esteem, or lack thereof, and signs of exclusion. See section 6.3.1.1.7.

²⁶ Zone of educational priority

Another factor was the curriculum and the policy applied in general. Because of their type of upbringing, the children could not adapt to the demands of the imposed curriculum and the language policy adopted in schools, and they felt that there were too many hurdles to surmount to achieve their goals. 6.3.1.1.1 and 6.3.2.1 gives more insight into how the life experiences were influenced.

It was through the interviews that I came to understand that the children had little space to voice out their feelings and emotions in the institutions, despite the fact that psychologists and social workers are attached to the school to listen to their grievances. No external organisation was present to listen to them (e.g. Child Development Unit (CDU), Ombudsperson for Children).

5.7.3 Self-experiences

However, a study of the influences that emerged from the self-experiences of the participants leaves a ray of hope that the children are not doomed to failure. Failing academically was not the end of the world for the children as they had other agendas beyond schooling.

The study showed how the children used various defence mechanisms in adverse situations. The children chose to be the masters of their fate rather than be subdued by the grim realities of life. They chose to fight back in their own way against the injustices as they claimed. This is shown in section 7.3.2.1 in Chapter 7.

The study also showed that when the children were offered opportunities to oppose adversity they readily made use of such helping hands to stay in the system rather than leave it. However, these opportunities were not sustained over time as they grew up, and other elements stepped in where sometimes whatever was acquired served no purpose, driven by different agendas (7.3.2.2).

Drawing on their own experiences of being continually put down by those around them, these children also use the same methods of the oppression that they had borne on others. Being branded as children beyond control and uninterested in academic pursuits, they live up to that label.

As a result of the internalisation of their oppression, the children had their own agenda. Life-saving skills and later street skills became their priority rather than academic skills, and that preference turned out to be an obstacle to their future life (7.3.2.3).

At the end of this section, the influences that have emerged in the life experiences of the participants give a much better insight into the phenomenon under study.

The co-constructed narratives (Chapter 4), the cross-case analysis of the narratives (Chapter 5) have answered the first two critical questions of the thesis. These were:

CQ1. What are the life experiences of dropping out within the Mauritian educational context?

Through the interviews of the participants, I was able to co-construct the narratives of the participants. The narratives showed how the participants experienced schooling within their family, their environment and in institutions such as the school.

CQ2. How do these life experiences develop an understanding of dropping out in the Mauritian context?

From the cross-case analysis of the narratives, different influences emerged from the out-of-school, in-school and self-contexts that have all impacted on the process of dropping out. Some are covered by existing literature in the literature review chapter. Such influences will now be further analysed in Chapters 6 and 7, to see what new, existing, surprising influences of the dropping out process have emerged.

5.8 Chapter synthesis

In this chapter, the cross-analysis of the narratives of each participant tends to give an understanding of the process that the participants went through during their time in the education system to eventually drop out or be pushed out. From the narratives, we can make out that the participants have gone through undue stress in their family life, notwithstanding the strenuous relationship among the family members. This shows power-related/submissive issues with which the children were confronted. However, while they were offered opportunities to resist, the opportunities were not sustained. Even the peers tried to provide opportunities to the participants. Nevertheless, we see also the role of the neighbourhood in which the participants lived and what has been its

contribution in the dropping out/pushing out process. We have also tried to understand the role played by the peers, not only in resisting but also how they contributed to the process. We have tried to understand how the participants felt about themselves and their worthiness. Finally, the schooling factors were analysed, mainly the curriculum and policy and the teacher's attitude towards the participants to understand how they contributed towards dropping out or being pushed out.

Through this analysis, I was able to understand how the issues related to the life experiences of the participants were linked to their dropping out/pushing out in the Mauritian context. I have constantly used the term dropping out and pushing out in this chapter because the analysis of the narratives showed that it was not necessarily true to say that the participants dropped out. These experiences, over time, interacted to provide a space that was favourable to the process of leaving formal schooling. Were there opportunities that existed that would have allowed the participants to resist oppression and stress? I guess that with sustained prolonged interaction with external actors / spaces, the participants would have resisted. The next chapter will examine the relationship between the participants' life experiences and dropping out in relation to the theoretical frame work and the literature review. Finally, it can be summed up that the process of dropping out is the product of the social, political, economic and cultural dimensions interactions.

PART 3

Part 3 comprises two chapters, namely the comparison of the findings with extant literature and theoretical framework and the thesis. This part expresses in the first instance, how the findings confirm/reject/ totally discard what the existing literature says about the phenomenon of Out-of-school children. At the same it gives a new lens that can be used to understand how the process of dropping out develops over time during the schooling years of the participants.

The second chapter concludes the study. It provides concluding thoughts for the study and at the same time gives an idea of the limitations of the study as a whole, future development possibilities and the contribution to the methodological contributions, theoretical contributions and contextual contribution

CHAPTER 6

THE MAKING OF AN OOSC

6.1 Overview

This study, in the Mauritian context, has focused on the relationship between the life experiences of primary school children and their disengagement to ultimately reach the point of dropping out of school to become OOSC. Literature focusing on school dropouts suggests dropping out entails an extended period of students' disengagement from school (Murray, et al., 2004; Fredericks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004) and that being engaged means that children are involved behaviourally, emotionally and cognitively, in other words children are expected to be committed to and to be more participative in curricular and extra-curricular activities, to be positive towards teachers and classmates, to make greater efforts to tackle difficult situations and to understand complex ideas in order to achieve success (Fredericks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004) (see Chapter 2). This literature tends to argue that children are the ones who initiate the disengagement from school and, hence, that the problem of dropping out is child-activated. However, my study reveals other facets which may be interpreted as levers of (dis)engagement rather than the children's own disengagement. Children are in a continuing process of reflection on their schooling and life experiences.

In Chapter 5, the new insights from the cross-case analysis revealed that there are several forces that act on children during their schooling period and influence their actions, behaviours and attitudes all the way up to the end of their examinations and which, in some way, push them out of school

My study has revealed that the dropping out process arises from a combination of multiple social, environmental and personal factors activated inside and outside the school. This reinforces the force-field model of teacher development (Samuel, 2008) which was used as an analytical lens. I have classified these forces for my study as *in-school* influences, *out-of-school* influences and the influences of *self-experiences* of the children.

The cross-case analysis challenged the Bronfenbrenner (1994) theoretical lens that I originally deployed at the early stages of designing the study. The initial singular lens tended to suggest a rather mechanistic and rigid set of determining factors limiting the potential of the individual children's personal selfhood as an agentic force. Samuel's (2008) force field model allowed me the possibility of exploring patterns of interactive disengagement comprising dialogical discourses across the in-school, the out-of-school and the self-experiences of children. My new perspective grasps the relationships and interrelations between these constructs. Combining Samuel's (2008) and the Bronfenbrenner's model of human development allowed for the possibility of exploring these personal influences in relation with the social economic, political macro-influences. The force field model also suggested that the sources of influence are continually in dialogue sometimes receding and at other times surfacing to exert more effect and varying over different times and spaces. However, both existing literature and the new insights show that the principal cause of dropping out is the institution-related factors (as per extant literature) and the in-school influences. For this purpose, this chapter will bring the in-school influences in dialogue with the literature review and the theoretical framework. The next chapter (Chapter 7) will explore the forces emerging from the out-of-school and the self-experiences context and bring them in dialogue with the literature review and the theoretical framework.

6.2 Orientation to Chapter 6

The study aims at gaining new insights into the relationship between the life experiences of OOSC and the process of dropping out of school. In the previous chapter, the cross-comparison of the narratives showed the interaction between the in-school experiences and out-of-school experiences of the participants which they themselves mediated in the light of their own experiences.

This chapter aims to establish the similarities, differences, novelties and unexpected issues that surfaced in the new insights when compared with the original theoretical framework established in Chapter 2. This chapter picks up from the new insights that emerged in Chapter 5 and this section analyses these themes in relation to extant literature and the original theoretical framework. The chapter consists of two sections, namely section **A** that analyses the in-school influences and section **B** looks into the evolution of the general policy and curriculum that is a lever of disengagement

Section 6.3 is an analysis of what is new, surprising and different. I have chosen to focus on the in-school influences in this chapter as I feel that the main reasons for school dropouts are imbedded in the construct. The next chapter the out-of-school and the self-experiences influences will engage with the review of the literature and the theoretical framework.

This starts with the important role played in the disengagement process by the schools in the region which is explored in section 6.3.1.1. The regionalisation that acts shows an inequity in the admission process is analysed in 6.3.1.1.1 and in 6.3.1.1.2 the effect of regionalisation is shown as creating segregation and dependency on the part of the children. This ultimately leads to problems of behaviour and the label of backbenchers in 6.3.1.1.3. However, there is a call for help as children need help as shown in 6.3.1.1.4. The help needed by the children is not given because there is a missing component in the teacher development programme for slow learners as explored in 6.3.1.1.5 which is most probably a result of a policy and curriculum which favours the elitist system explored in 6.3.1.1.6. Although the policy talks about equity, we see that such equity is elusive and not sustained, explored in 6.3.1.1.7.

Part 6.3.1.4 covers the school teachers and administrators' attitudes towards working-class children and shows how these attitudes have influenced the teaching and learning process in favour of the elite. This is followed in 6.3.1.5. by an analysis of the teaching and learning process that takes place in primary schools and its influence on the OOSC.

Part 6.3.2 explores the post-independence policy as reinforcement of inequity over time. The curriculum and policy is explored in 6.3.2.1 where the historical factor is explored in 6.3.2.1.1 and the problems of policy change is also explored in 6.3.2.1.2.

Section 6.3.3 gives a brief outline the chapter synthesis.

6.3 Analysis of emergent influences

In Chapter 2, I used Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological development (1994) as a framework to guide me in the production of data. I explored the various systems as proposed by the theory and my interviews covered the family, the environment, their peers and relatives, the school and its environment in order to generate an understanding of the life experiences of the children. Although extant literature attributes children's disengagement to three factors, the socially related factors, the

institutional factors and the individual-related factors (Chapter 2 I found it difficult to limit myself to the analysis of each factor in relation to another. During the cross-case analysis, I found out that it was not possible to follow this pattern of disengagement proposed by the literature and I opted for an analytical framework (Samuel's force field model of teacher development (2008) which comprises the in-school, the out-of-school and the self-experiences of children where it was easier to grasp the relationships and interrelations between the constructs. Furthermore, the analytical model used jointly with Bronfenbrenner's model of human development allowed for the possibility of exploring these influences in relation with the social economic, political macro-influences. Chapter 5 has allowed these new constructs of analysis to emerge. The study shows that the influences that impact on children's disengagement from school are multifarious and are intertwined with the relationships that exist between out-of-school context, in-school context and self-experiences of the children (Chapter 5). Although Bronfenbrenner's theory mentioned the interrelationships between the different systems, the study shows that there are several forces that act on every aspect of the different systems and that the original framework has allowed us to gather enough data with which, together with the analytical lens, I was able to glide in and out of these systems while at the same time leaving enough space for children's experiences to mediate between these forces. Hence, this study has not only shed new light on the processes that take place within and between the different systems where pushing out and pulling-in forces are omnipresent in the life of the participants, but is in itself a novelty because it explores the ramifications between the different influences. The novelty of this study is that, unlike extant literature that exposed causal factors to explain disengagement, it shows the internal processes in the relationships in the life of the OOSC and why such relationships may lead them to be out of school.

SECTION A

6.3.1 In-school influences

The influences from the in-school context are analysed and brought in dialogue with literature and theoretical framework. Literature has shown that the institutional-related issues had a bigger impact on the disengagement process and that there was a huge gap between the children's versions and the teachers' versions. Thus this section will

explore the forces that have influenced children's relationship with the in-school context.

6.3.1.1 *Schools of the region*

This study shows that the school and the region in which these schools were situated, can have an impact on children's relationship with their institutions. The participants were attending the schools in their region of residence and most of the schools were ZEP schools. As the Mauritian education system favours the regionalisation of education, it is assumed that all the regions provide equality and equity in schooling. In recent years, the Government of Mauritius has attempted to upgrade the CPE performance results in primary schools. This project started as the "Project Schools", then became known as "Special Support Schools" and, more recently, as "ZEP schools" (World Data on Education, 2006/2007). The philosophy of the ZEP program introduced in 2010 is "based on the premise that positive reinforcement is required to create favourable learning conditions for children living, mostly in the less developed regions" (World Data on Education, 2006/2007). This project aims at using an inclusive pedagogy to promote equal opportunities in all primary schools as it addresses children from low socioeconomic groups. It is worth mentioning that out of the 28 ZEP schools in Mauritius, 27 are state-run and controlled by the Ministry of Education, and one by the Roman Catholic Education Authority. There is no study as to the difference in approach to governance between the two entities. Thus, as can be seen, the ZEP project not only aims at the CPE success rate but also at social justice in that it provides the zone or environment with better resources through empowerment.

A report from the Ministry of Education in 2012 showed that there has been slight progress in achievement rates in the ZEP schools but that there were also loopholes in the project (Ministry of Education, 2012). Such was also the case in France where the same principle of ZEP applied (Benabou, Kramarz & Prost, 2007). Although extant literature attributes disengagement of children to school and classroom factors (Murray et al., 2004) or to school structures and school management (Rumberger, 2001), the study shows that in Mauritius schools are labelled according to their end-of-year performances. High-status schools (or high-demand schools) are attended by affluent people while at the other extreme, the schools that have a low status, the ZEP schools, are attended by the deprived. The two types of schools that are found at the two

extremes practise a student-segregation policy based on the social composition of children, as affirmed by Rumberger (2001). This segregation is, unconsciously, a result of policy decisions that will be argued in 6.3.1.1.1. However, the study has shown that even though most of the participants were attending a school where mostly the deprived were admitted, they have never shown a disposition to disengage from school. Furthermore, out of the 259 primary schools of Mauritius (Statistic's Mauritius, 2016), 34 are 'high demand schools' and 28 are ZEP schools. Hence, there are 197 schools of Mauritius where children are enrolled on a fairly equal social composition and yet there are also children who disengage from these schools as the study showed, but there was more cooperation among the children as shown in 6.3.1.1.2.

However, the chronologically low status and low performing schools carried a labelling effect which also affects the children and the teachers who attend such schools. Despite the laudable goal of searching for equality in education for children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, there are some issues which emerged from the study which question the legitimacy of such a project. The first is that of regionalisation, which is a policy decision.

6.3.1.1.1 *Regionalisation: inequity in admission*

Despite the fact that children are admitted to primary schools on the basis of regionalisation, very often those of middle-class families use different stratagems to avoid the ZEP schools in their regions (as explained in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2). Admission to primary schools is done on a regional basis and parents have to present a utility bill and proof of address to seek admission. Since some schools are considered as 'star schools' or 'high demand schools' (schools with high rates of CPE passes) as opposed to ZEP schools, parents seek houses to rent in such regions where the star schools are located, or they foot the utility bill of the proprietors with the promise that the bills are issued on their name. Others prefer to join a private school in the region where there is a 'star secondary school'. Others get their children transferred to 'star schools' from Grade 2 onwards by pulling strings, as shown in the study. Thus, admission to primary school is based on power-related issues where affluent families makes use of the flaws that the policy decisions offer unconsciously. Though I advanced the idea that the decision to apply the concept of regionalisation may be unconscious, the fact remains that at the end of the day, the middle-class families get all the desired the

outcomes at the end of the primary schooling. I also argue that in schools found between the high demand and the ZEP schools (which I will call normal schools), there is also a segregation that takes place in the form of frontbenchers and backbenchers children.

Although the ZEP project involves other stakeholders, such as parents, the school community, private companies, social facilitators who contribute towards improvement of the school environment to achieve success, as proposed by the NEA (2008) in extant literature, the outcome has remained the same over the years. Middle-class parents not only shun the ZEP schools, but they also intervene in the functioning of the schools classified as normal schools through their participation in the administrative functioning, for example through the Parent-Teachers association (PTA). This section shows that consciously or unconsciously, the schools in the regions of Mauritius have the effect of pulling in or pushing children, and very often children from deprived families are pushed out. Although the theoretical framework allowed the instruments to obtain the data, the analysis shows a class-status effect, through policy decisions, that pushes children out of school.

6.3.1.1.2 *Institutional and social dependency*

My study shows that children could not rely wholly on their home environment to achieve in school. They depend a lot on the school and their peers. The study shows that low student achievement is dependent not only on parents and schools but also on the types of schools they attend. In extant literature, teachers blamed absenteeism, lack of parent engagement and the socioeconomic status of the parents to explain children's low achievement. This study, as opposed to extant literature, shows that whatever be the conditions that they were experiencing at home and in the family, the working-class children in schools have a better achievement rate where there is a fair mix of working-class and middle-class children in the school. Therefore, their dependence on the school was minimal as compared with the dependence on their friends. Middle-class children tend to pull-in working-class children in the system (see 7.3.1.5) and that teachers are more conciliatory in such cases. The problem is that the ZEP schools have a higher concentration of children from a low socioeconomic status; therefore, there are limited pull-in factors due to the middle-class children shunning the ZEP schools (Reay & Lucey, 2004). In extant literature, Veiga et al. (2014) advocated that once a group of members

is formed, they have a tendency to share the same characteristics. However, the study shows how the children can adapt to various types of friends in the same school, depending on their own agenda. It all depends on who is being valorised and how. Thus, this shows again that the school acts as a push-out force while the association with positive peers valorises and pulls children in. Rumberger (2004) recommended that there should be more intervention at the individual level to facilitate children's engagement but this study, on the contrary, shows that more intervention is needed in our policy to prevent segregating middle-class and working-class children. However, this segregation seems to be wanted by middle-class parents. It seems that the theoretical framework could have been coupled with the social class theory of education as it seems that social class matters where education is concerned.

6.3.1.1.3 *Behaviour and backbenchers*

Children in class are further segregated when they unconsciously turn out to be frontbenchers and backbenchers. But this 'arrangement' seems to make class management easier for teachers. The study shows how children who felt that they lacked support from the teachers tend to join forces with those who do not conform thus dividing the class into the conformists who were frontbenchers and obtained the teachers attention. Teachers claimed, in extant literature, that the children misbehaved a lot and that there was a lot of aggressiveness in the children. On the other hand, children argued that teachers were disrespectful towards them, that the classrooms were boring and they were victims of unfair treatment. The study shows that children from deprived areas seemed to be neglected by teachers and most probably it was because of behaviour problems or because of academic problems where children were not able to follow the class. Even though extant literature tells us that the children were aware of their marginalisation in the chronologically low-achieving schools, the study, however, shows that children became aggressive when they felt that there was some kind of injustice and this tends to confirm the children's version for the reasons of their disengagement. Teachers should understand that low-socio economic children are often aggressed and, as such, they tend to respond the only way they know to aggression for having experienced it. Extant literature tells us that children who are shouted at very often feel humiliated. Very often when the children felt ignored, they grouped as backbenchers with other children having the same behavioural problem and academic

weakness. It is generally believed that backbenchers are the mischievous ones, the non-conformists, the trouble-makers, the odd ones. Children, the study found out, are made to become backbenchers through injustice, or by being ignored by teachers. The study shows that children who are welcomed as frontbenchers have the tendency to respond to the outstretched hand that is provided to them, despite peer pressure. In the study, the children who tend to misbehave find solace among the other children who have been branded like them and are thus considered as backbenchers, but they never tried to disengage from school. The study also gives the feeling that frontbenchers gain more of the teachers' attention as opposed to the backbenchers. When children progress from backbenchers to frontbenchers they are rejected by their peers and very often they revert back under peer pressure. This, however, was not the case in heterogeneous schools and it seems that middle-class way of life was more appealing to the working-class children. This may be a possible explanation as to why heterogeneous classes are more helpful for working-class children. This segregation seems to be accepted and encouraged by teachers, because then they are able to give more attention to the conformists. Although streaming is banned from the education system, this arrangement seems to be a sort of streaming in the classroom.

6.3.1.1.4 *Needing help*

The children in the study were not getting the appropriate academic support from their family and thus they sought for help from teachers. Unfortunately, help in schools of disadvantaged areas was rare, especially in suburban regions. Teachers, according to Hancock and Zubrick (2015) in extant literature, gave more importance to their role in pedagogy and the content of the curriculum and they did not believe in building a strong relationship with children. However, teachers in the study seem to be demotivated and even those who have opted to work in ZEP schools for which they are paid an extra allowance attributed their demotivation to external factors; thus that teachers have their own locus of control. This may be explained by the fact that teachers feel more motivated when they work with children who have a positive and conforming behaviour and who are high-flyers (Ercole, 2009).. The study shows that children are left on their own to make meaning out of lessons that have not been understood or to seek for external help. The children believe that if they took private tuition, then their problems would be solved and they also feel that this would improve the relationship between

themselves and the teachers. They also feel that sometimes the reluctance of teachers to respond to their problems is due to the fact that they cannot take private tuition from the teacher concerned. Extant literature tells us that teachers felt that a strong relationship was not needful to keep children engaged. But in heterogeneous or rural schools, the teachers felt that they had to help the children who are in need, believing in the children's capability. Their relationship with the children was quite strong as the study shows. It seems that the label associated with the school demotivates teachers thus contributing to push out children from schools. Section 6.3.1.1.3 explained why children did not have a positive behaviour in class, and the reason was that they felt that there was an injustice towards them. Middle-class children did not have the same treatment that they (the working-class children) received in schools in deprived regions. But it seems that teachers' low motivation can also be attributed to the recognition (or non-recognition) that they get (or do not get) when working with high achievers as opposed to low achievers. This seems to be in contradiction with what Nawaz and Yasin (2015) argued about teachers' low motivation being attributed to the attitude that administrators give to rich children. Working in low-achieving schools and with low achievers may not be motivating and rewarding in terms of recognition. This issue of relationship between the school and teachers and socioeconomic status of families seems to be an influence in the pushing out of children from school.

6.3.1.1.5 *Teacher development programmes and slow learners*

The study shows that in many cases teachers were discouraged and that may be the reason why they refused to answer questions from the slow learners. In extant literature teachers also claimed that the teacher's guide was not appropriate and that somehow, they were not motivated to work, while at the same time putting the blame on children's disengagement with schooling. Is the problem of teachers a lack of training or do they feel less empowered to work with the children in disadvantaged areas? Or, bluntly put, is it their refusal to shoulder their responsibilities as shown in the study? This is one of the gaps that was raised in the review of the literature. Another gap that was raised was the question of teacher demotivation. When teachers refuse to answer students, they are shirking their responsibilities. Is it because either they do not know how to respond or they do not know what to answer?

This raises the question of the reliability of the teacher development programmes, which seem to provide a training programme adapted to those who conform to the system. Maybe the programme does not show teachers how to work with non-conformists. And if teacher's development programmes do not provide enough training to work with disadvantaged children, how can the ZEP project be successful? We can then wonder whether the ZEP project is not simply a subterfuge to prevent middle-class and working-class children from attending the same school as very often working-class children are considered as being undisciplined, not interested in studying and tagged other labels thus leading to teacher demotivation (Appavoo, 2014; (Benabou, Kramarz & Prost, 2007). Hence they are seen as anti-conformists. The ZEP project is not the only one which separates working-class children and middle-class children. The prevocational schools project (now called the extended programmes) in its setup also creates a separation of working-class and middle-class children. However, children in the study, feel more at ease in the prevocational classes because they find the project more to their liking as it provides them with life skills. The study shows that the curriculum was more to their liking and that teachers were keen in their roles as knowledge providers. It must be specified that normal stream teachers and PVE teachers do not have the same programme of teacher development. Furthermore, the PVE curriculum is more adapted to slow learners. Nevertheless, unfair treatment and injustice are all factors that push them out of the educational institutions. These factors may be the outcome of a teacher development programme which does not make provision for the inclusion of disadvantaged children and thus contributes to push out disadvantaged children from school.

Nevertheless, there is another aspect that has to be taken into consideration. Most of the ZEP schools are state schools, and therefore the staff are employed by the Public Service Commission (PSC). Teachers (or staff) employed in this system have a higher scope of promotion as compared to teachers of Confessional schools as they may opt to apply for promotion to another state department and thus are not obliged to remain in the education sector. It may be that a refusal for promotion from the PSC either for headship or to move in another department may be a source of demotivation. That may also explain why some teachers are not committed to their engagement in the teaching profession in the deprived areas as most probably their prime objectives were not to become teachers. Does that explain why there is only one ZEP school in the Confessional

sector - where there is less scope of promotion, thus more commitment? This disparity in the status between state-owned schools and confessional schools is by itself a source of inequity, although they earn the same salary but not the same privileges. This is another policy decision that may serve as a push out factor for children when the teachers' source of demotivation is elsewhere. For teachers, promotion means climbing higher in status. Thus we are also confronted with the theoretical framework which could have been coupled with the social class theory to explain how the class system pushes children from disadvantaged areas out of school.

6.3.1.1.6 Policy and curriculum favouring the elitist system rather than the ZEP project

The teachers, in existing literature, claimed that the syllabus was not convenient to children in ZEP schools and that it should be downscaled; in other words, the syllabus should be made easier for children in disadvantaged areas because they may not be able to assimilate the whole syllabus. The children in the study never complained about a syllabus that did not suit them, except that at times they complained that the teaching was too fast. In fact, they only complained about learning the languages, but apart from that they felt that they were doing well in other subjects. Why did teachers propose a downscaling of the curriculum? Was it the children who were the problem or was it the teaching process that posed a problem? If they felt that the children were the problem, then how did they ensure a positive transmission of knowledge? Again, I maintain that most probably, the teacher development programme that is offered to the teachers lacks a component or module of how to teach children from deprived areas and of low academic background (Ercole, 2009). But this argument also confirms that the policy and curriculum framework (see also 6.3.2.1) favours an elitist system of education where the focus is more on the human capital investment since independence. Bunwaree (2001) stressed the fact that the constrained and elitist evaluation of the primary education system is so strenuous that it favours rote learning by the students rather than creativity. It seems that by their upbringing, working-class children favour more creative learning than rote learning (7.3.1.1.3). Extant literature from Lapacinski (1991) also claimed that middle-class children were favoured by the design of the curriculum. He also claimed that working-class children used the inequity of the system to blame themselves and to use it as a reason to disengage. Although the children in the current

study noticed this inequity, they never disengaged but they rather strove to make an effort to succeed. Failure was not a reason for them to disengage. Are teachers biased against working-class children? It may be that our current policy system of primary teaching is a problem in the sense that a primary teacher accompanies his or her students from Grade 4 to Grade 6, thus working for three consecutive years with them, five days a week, six hours per day. It could be demotivating for a teacher when he or she works with children who are late developers/learners, as the teacher has three years to complete a whole syllabus designed by others. Ercole (2009, p. 5)), a researcher in psychology from the University of Connecticut, tells us that teachers have a tendency to have a positive expectation for high-flyers as compared to low-flyers and that due to this expectation, teachers “inevitably altered their teaching environment” to accommodate more the high-flyers rather than the low-flyers. One such example is that if there is a need to slow down to accommodate such learners, there will never be time to complete the syllabus. That may be the reason why teachers prefer to encourage front and back benchers so as to give all his attention to the frontbenchers. It seems once more that the education policy does not leave room for teachers to engage in more creative teaching, encouraged by Paley (1986) and Boynton and Boynton (2005). This encourages elitism to the detriment of equity. It seems therefore that the policy projects an image of Mauritius as a learning hub, thus masking the backyard where OOSC were striving for equity. This is the reason why I insist on calling the ZEP project as a naïve policy or a make-believe policy.

The ZEP project is one that is financed by the UNDP. A protocol was signed in March 2006 between the Ministry of Education and the UNDP where the UNDP commits itself to provide help in order to respect the country’s engagement towards the MDGs (Mahadeo & Gurrib, 2008). Aid was provided in staff’s in-service courses, community projects and the establishment of assessment markers. In 2006, the Honourable Minister of Education stated in his speech:

Today’s event also represents my Ministry’s structured response to the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, 1990) and the World Education Forum (Dakar, 2000). We can say that Mauritius has already initiated reforms in our educational system to ensure universal primary education. These reforms are expected to achieve EFA (Education For All) goals and in its wake set forth concrete actions which are in line with the objectives set by Millennium Development Goals (2006).

It seems that the aim of all elected government is to put emphasis on the requirements of the MDG and EFA goals but in reality, these aims remain at a level of discourses rather than being at a level of implementation and successful achievement (Harber & Davies, 2009). In their study in Sub-Saharan Africa, they advocate that in order to achieve these MDG and EFA goals, it is important to lay more focus on teacher education in these regions. However, in this study, all, if not most, of the teachers are fully qualified and have obtained appropriate teacher education. Why could they not deliver at the ZEP schools? Despite the partial failure of the ZEP project, Mauritius has, in the eyes of international organisations, fulfilled its mission of initiating reforms. However, a report published 2 years later (ODEROI, 2008) highlighted that the pass rate, which was one of the main objectives of the project, had not known a significant improvement and that other methods should be used to decrease the number of failures. One such is the policy of retaking (re-sit) the CPE exams. The criteria for re-assessment are given below:

RE-ASSESSMENT

14.1 After the issue of results, a re-assessment will be organised by the MES in the core subjects for candidates who have not met the minimum requirement at paragraph 6, and require at least Grade 5 in only one ‘additional’ subject.

14.2 To be eligible to take part in the re-assessment, a candidate must have attained:

- (i) Grade 5 in at least three subjects including in at least two of either Mathematics, English or French; or
- (ii) Grade 5 in 2 of Mathematics, English or French and at least Intermediate Level in the non-core subject.”

(Mauritius Examinations syndicate, 2015)

Paragraph 6 reads as follows:

CONDITIONS FOR NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK LEVEL 1 QUALIFICATION

6.1 The PSAC will be pitched as a Level 1 qualification on the National Qualifications Framework provided that candidates have achieved the following minimum requirements -

Either

(a) Grade 5 in Mathematics, French and English;

and

(b) Grade 5 in one of the three following subjects -

(i) Science;

(ii) History & Geography;

(iii) One Asian language or Arabic or Kreol Morisien, as the case may be.

Or

(a) Grade 5 in Mathematics, French and English; and

(b) an aggregate of 30% of the total marks in -

(i) English, Mathematics, French, Science and History & Geography taken altogether; or

(ii) English, Mathematics, French, Science, History & Geography and an Asian

Or

language or Arabic or Kreol Morisien, as the case may be, taken altogether.

(a) Grade 5 in Mathematics, French and English; and

(b) At least Intermediate Level in Communication Skills in respect of any two languages”

(Ibid)

The purpose of the re-sit is to bring down the failure rate at the end of the year, thus showing that there has been an improvement in the CPE achievement.

6.3.1.1.7 *Elusive equity*

All the discourses regarding the provision of equal opportunity to children from disadvantaged areas make no sense if the curriculum and policy practices have remained elitist. The children participating in my study have argued that it was difficult for them to understand what the policy for CPE meant. They were never in a situation to understand whether they had passed or failed their CPE. Despite all the hope that was placed in the project, it still fails children from disadvantaged areas. Unfortunately, the focus was not on re-establishing equity in the educational sector but rather directed towards ensuring CPE success. Nevertheless, a report of Statistics Mauritius in 2017 showed that there was a decline in pass rate in the year 2015/2016 for the CPE examination (from 70.3% in 2015 to 69.8% in 2016) which was readjusted to 74.7% after the re-sit (Statistics Mauritius, 2017), despite all the manipulation to bring down the failure rate.

After an exploration of the schools of the regions and their influence on children's disengagement, my conviction is reinforced that middle-class and working-class children are separated in order to favour elitism and to give teachers greater motivation and that the ZEP project has contributed to consolidate that separation (Ercole, 2009). The study shows that the ZEP project has failed both in practice and as a policy because it pushes working-class children out of schools. My study highlights the push-out and pull-in forces. More disparities may have been exposed if the theoretical framework was used together with the social class theory to explore the life experiences of OOSC, which would have probably shown how working-class children survive in middle-class schools.

Thus the question that has to be asked is whether dropout is desired, in other words, are children made to disengage or are they symbolically excluded? It appears that school dropout is an indirect expectation of the education system (Fan & Wolters, 2019): it could be considered as an indirect means of ensuring the development of blue-collar employees. Goux, Gurgand and Maurin (2014) tell us that there is a great discrepancy between what children hope to do and what the school offers for them to benefit from the system. The same chances are not offered to children with a lower academic record

as the system allows space only for a uniform set of schooling system as outcome. Hence, we see in this study that the CPE continues to maintain the similar pass rate which privileges certain class groups of individuals (Statistics Mauritius, 2017), in other words the academically brilliant students. The successful CPE graduate has access to better schools and ultimately, to better career prospects. The ZEP project is therefore implicated in sustaining class stratification structure, to promote the interest of the elite. The ZEP project and the prevocational project, unconsciously or not, perpetuate segregation so that middle-class children benefit from all the privileges that higher education offers, thus raising their status and ensuring that a working-class continues to exist for the blue-collar jobs. It is wanted because teachers and school administrators have not been trained to accommodate children branded as ‘beyond control’ within the school; because there is no place for children who do not conform to the dictates of those who argue that schooling helps in the integration of youths in the economic system (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). It is wanted because middle-class policy makers want to renew the traditional idea of class structure to perpetuate the economic hierarchy system (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Mauritius shows to international organisations the picture of a healthy, highly educated nation through the laureate system and through its economic and financial development but, under the surface, the disadvantaged are kept away so that they do not spoil the image of an ideal successful elitist education system projected to international bodies. The ZEP project, just like the prevocational project, through their philosophy, has shown that equity based on social justice has remained elusive in Mauritius (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). Although Fiske and Ladd refer to racial equity, I have tried in this study to make abstraction of the element of race and concentrate more on the social justice aspect as opposed to Gill (2012) and Asgarally (1997). The policies aim at providing more equity for disadvantaged children but in reality, pushes them to disengagement and ultimately to dropping out. Working-class children do not have equal treatment and equal opportunity because of their social status.

6.3.1.2 *Teachers and school administrators’ attitudes*

The study shows that the attitudes of teachers and school administrators towards working-class children were unfavourable to the children who entertained doubts as to whether there was any social justice in the decisions taken against them. Teachers and school administrators are not only the legal executants of the policy decision makers but

are also role models to the children under their care. However, extant literature shows how teachers tried to explain low performances of children, especially in the ZEP schools, by putting the blame on the children and the parents for not achieving. Furthermore, according to extant literature, teachers were trained to engage students in creative methods but the report from ODEROI (2008) shows that the same traditional teaching methods were used for the children with the result that it all ended in teachers being demotivated. Demotivation was not due to extrinsic rewards but was rather intrinsically motivated. However, the study shows two aspects that have influenced the children's engagement, namely the 'refusal to teach' and the general attitudes towards the disadvantaged children. The first influence is analysed in 6.3.1.1 and the second in 6.3.1.3.

6.3.1.2.1 *What explains teachers and administrators' general attitudes towards the children?*

The study shows that the teachers' attitudes in the rural areas were very conciliatory with the children whereas in the suburban areas the attitudes were different. Queries of the children were not attended to and children were 'turned' into backbenchers when they were not able to grasp the meaning-making process. Even the attitudes of the school administrators in the suburban areas were less compliant as opposed to those in the rural areas. Usually rural area teachers have a more compliant attitude towards the working-class children because very often they come from these areas or ask to work in areas where they come from, which explains why they know what problems the children face at home. When the children were absent because of family problems, they were welcomed by the teachers who eagerly tried to get them to catch up on the studies. But such was not the case in urban or suburban schools where teachers and administrators had biased perceptions on the behaviour and academic ability of the children. Teachers in the study, especially in non-rural schools, were aware of the cultural capital of their students and as the teachers were from the middle class, they paid more attention to middle-class children to the detriment of working-class children (Ercole, 2009). This was also visible when the school administrators in the study showed more bias when they had to deal with the children for breach of discipline. In truth, the teachers showed that they had knowledge of the subject matter but lacked pedagogical knowledge in their praxis (Martinjak, 2015). Were the problems encountered by the children a fault of the

teacher education process or were they a matter of power and dominance of one culture? We have seen already that this may be a possibility in 6.3.1.1.5. It seems that the children went through a process of non-acceptance by teachers and administrators and that the children were pushed out because child behaviour and teachers' expectations did not match. This, in turn, triggers a conflict in the practice of teachers.

6.3.1.3 *Teaching and learning*

The study also shows that the teaching and learning process is one that influences the disengagement process of children. In many cases, children see the classroom as being non-receptive to their learning difficulties. This can be seen especially in ZEP schools. Teachers working in the ZEP schools were unmotivated as shown in the study. Why were teachers demotivated? They had a low expectation of students' achievement while, on the other hand, the children lacked motivation for learning because they were easily discouraged by teachers who looked at them as children lacking academic ability. The study also shows that teachers had a negative expectation when there is a high concentration of low SES in a school. In the process, the children, although they tried hard, did not receive any encouragement from the teachers. However, when children are blamed for their disengagement, there is most probably a motive behind it. One of the motives is that teachers are not fully equipped to work with disadvantaged children, as depicted in 6.3.1.1.5 above. If children from low SES have the reputation that is assigned to them, it is because they have been labelled as such, especially by the system and the media. The media and society project a negative image of the ZEP schools as well as their students. The ZEP connotation was given to schools (and not students) with less than 40% CPE success. If the school fails, then the blame should fall on the teachers, the administrators and the policymakers. Given the fact that ZEP schools are associated with low-income regions, the blame seems to be set on the region as being deficient. The study shows how the children were stigmatised and labelled whenever some form of indiscipline could be attributed to them. Schissel (1997) tells us that those who have access to power create what is called "moral panic" in order to hide other facets of life. Giving a bad reputation to the school allows decision makers to open up parallel systems and to justify their choice. One such aspect is the process of gentrification that is taking place in the region where one of the participants resides. The construction of IRSs as a complete village in itself is one of the facets on which

silence prevails. The IRS is mostly populated by foreign nationals who have their own schools, medical facilities and shopping complex within the resort. But for the process of gentrification to take place, the working-class families are slowly pushed to the suburbs in order to vacate the seaside areas for the construction of star-hotels and IRS. Schissel says that panic serves an elitist purpose and it is always used to mask youth unemployment or allocation of cheap jobs in the regions for working-class families. However, when teachers' expectation is low, students also tend to lose confidence in the school and the institution, as shown in the study, and that could not be attributed to children's disengagement (Rubie-Davies, 2008). The fact that when teachers no longer believe in the achievement capacity of their students, they lose motivation and the input does not follow. That is why teachers in the ODEROI project wanted a downscaling of the curriculum and subject matter. The study shows that whatever teachers expect from students definitely affects their performance and contributes to an unequal classroom climate. This was seen in the narratives of the children from the ZEP schools. The issue of demotivated teachers was also raised in existing literature but the theoretical framework did not allow a deeper analysis of the reasons why teachers were demotivated. A proposal for such a reason has been given in 6.3.1.1.5 and which seems to be external to schooling and may be more personal. This study has shown the reason why teachers were demotivated and how it makes a difference between pushing out and pulling in children in the system.

SECTION B

6.3.2 Post-independence policy

A look at the issues raised in the in-school factors analysis shows how the different aspects of schooling serves as a push-out force, pushing children to disengage. We have seen that several of these push-out factors are related to the curriculum and policy and thus I have tried to explore what is contributing unconsciously to this segregation of deprived children from schooling.

6.3.2.1 Curriculum and policy in reinforcement of inequity

Based on the above assumptions, we need to see what role the curriculum and policy decisions have played to reinforce the separation of the disadvantaged from the

advantaged. Extant literature tells that through different policies applied for school effectiveness, it is possible that indirectly children are brought to disengage (Rumberger, 2001). One such example maybe the ZEP project. Prior to the introduction of the project teachers were trained in using new media materials that would enhance children's personal development, self-respect and knowledge (Gurrib & Mahadeo, 2009). The study shows that historically and in practice, nothing has changed. There are two aspects that need to be analysed: the historical factor and the different changes in policy.

6.3.2.1.1 *The historical factor*

Most of the curriculum policy in education dates back to pre-colonial times. The policy which existed before independence and which was designed with a specific purpose for specific people may be outdated for our modern times. The policy decisions of 1957 are still being used and form part of the amended Education Act 1957, re-amended in 2005, 2008, 2012. During the pre-independence period, education was provided to those who could afford it as, apart from primary education, education was fee-paying.

Education in Mauritius, during the colonial days, was a matter of providing instruction to the white elite (Ramdoyal, 1977). However, the history of English and French languages in Mauritius is due to the complex colonisation system based on power between the French speakers and the British speakers (Mahadeo, 2004). Although the British, who were in power as from 1810, tried to anglicise the island, they were too few as opposed to the French colonisers who stayed on the island (Mahadeo, 2004). Thus, the French colonisers were allowed to keep their mode of life as laid down by the Bilingual Treaty of 1810. Tirvassen (2007) tells us that English was introduced as a language of communication, in the judiciary and also for the control of institutions and that these decisions also impacted on the education policy. The British paid attention to both the Protestants and the Catholics in their policy on education, even though such was not the case under French rule. The Protestants were more interested in instructing the Negroes and the coloured people while the Catholics were always concerned with the instruction of the white elite. Prior to free primary education in 1944, only those who could afford to pay for their education had access to schools. At that time, both English and French formed part of the curriculum.

When working-class children joined primary schools, they had limited knowledge of either language as they were either Creole or Bhojpur speaking. Mahadeo (2004) claims that many critics blame the high rate of failures in the Mauritian education system on the language policy (Foondun, 1998; UNESCO, 1991), but it is rather difficult to blame the language policy entirely as success at the CPE is decided on passing in French, English and Mathematics. Failure in any one of the subjects forfeits the success on any student. However, this policy does not favour working-class children who need to sit for five examination papers set in English. Due to the fact that both the French and the English wanted to show their supremacy through language policies, Mahadeo concludes that "the case of Mauritius shows that the hegemony of the dominant colonial languages (English and French) was buttressed by a linguistic ideology in both empires," all to the detriment of working-class children. However, a Mauritian elite emerged despite the policies, and they fought to move Mauritius gradually towards independence.

However, after independence Mauritius could only depend on its human capital and a single crop economy (Mahadeo, 2004; Sonck, 2005), thus more emphasis was placed on education and, especially, education of the masses. Secondary education was not free except for a few state colleges run by the Ministry of Education. Access to these colleges was determined by the results at the end of primary education and scholarships were offered to the elite students. School fees for the other secondary schools varied depending on the status of the college; Confessional schools were the most coveted and had the highest fees. This was the beginning of the concept of star-colleges. With free secondary education in 1977, access to star state and confessional secondary schools became more important and the end of year primary examination was used as a mode of selection for admission to these secondary schools. Since independence the middle-class decision makers have perpetuated an elitist education system with the goal of getting access to the best schools.

It gives the impression that when policy is generated, it is done to achieve greater equity and equality towards the most vulnerable children in society. I have presented the historical setting of policy declaration in order to show that, despite the several economic, social, demographic and cultural changes that the country has gone through since independence, the core of the policy was designed for the colonial and the middle-class elites of that time. The several changes in policy since 1968 have kept the core

policy intact and simply grafted on new by-policy that makes it difficult and complicated to be enacted by newcomers in the teaching profession. One such example is the language policy. But in the enactment of the different policies, working-class children are unfortunately victim of collateral damage of the unintended effects of such policy. The study shows that whenever the children were guilty of indiscipline, they were made to accept the decisions taken against them, conferred by policy. Amin et al. (2016) argue that when oppressed people accept the situation they are in, being treated unjustly, being marginalised by those in power, they are in a situation of cognitive damage. Oppressors use the school system to promote their values in order to keep an elite alive to the detriment of the masses (Amin et al., 2016)). Thus, the ZEP schools were put in place to provide a space to oppressed children because they were a barrier to the promotion of values of the elite in the star schools.

6.3.2.1.2 *The problems of policy change*

But why is it that, despite all the changes since independence to Mauritianise education, the system has failed? Several attempts were made to Mauritianise the curriculum (Bhowon, 1990; Hollup, 2004) and, yet, no plan or action put forward has been fully implemented and all have undergone changes nearly every five years (Bhowon 1990). Policy changes in education are initiated by the Minister of Education and implemented by a policy elite comprising the Minister, the Director of the MIE and the Permanent Secretary (Bhowon, 1990). The same study shows how different ministers of education have over the years tried to bring about changes in the education system, especially in the primary school sector but yet have failed to reach their primary objectives. All these ‘plans of change’ which are quite laudable projects were all and are still being confronted with various forces which have in mind personal gratification rather than a Mauritianised gratification (Bhowon, 1990). Such forces are reinforced by internal forces like the media, religious bodies, the mass political behaviours, international aid agencies, historical-geographical conditions and socioeconomic compositions who, through their own hidden agenda, were always in conflict with whoever represented the decision makers or the policy-elite (Bhowon, 1990). There are two aspects that seem to emerge from a close analysis of this fact. First, that any policy change undergoes pressure from different forces and second, as suggested by Samuel and Mariaye (2017, p. 177), Mauritian history is marked by a “complex intersection of continuity and change” .

The authors showed how in post-colonial Mauritius, despite the different overtures to different perspectives that are available, our island is still linked with our dominant colonisers. Despite the willingness to change, the policy elite, who are themselves a product of the forces of international cultures through their interaction with the foreign world, are convinced that the same cultures would be beneficial to the Mauritian policy. We can see in the study how the core policies have remained almost unchanged in comparison to those before 1957 and a few grafted modifications have been brought to accommodate various economic, social and cultural changes. If such is the case, working-class children will continue to be push-out victims of policy decision makers.

The study shows that very often the different policy decisions and curriculum changes are a deterrent to the working-class children despite all the engagement that they put in to remain engaged. These policies have in the long run played against them in favour of middle-class children, even though this was not the intended outcome of the same policies. The study shows that working-class children are collateral victims of the language policy and the pass/failure criteria which date back to before 1957 and on which was grafted the ZEP policy decision with an outcome of pushing out children rather than providing equity.

6.4 Chapter synthesis

This chapter has analysed the in-school influences that emerged from Chapter 5. The different analysis of the content has shown how there has been a constant (un)conscious praxis that pushed children from the deprived areas to disengage from schooling. The schools of the regions showed that there was a social segregation between the 'high demand schools' and the ZEP schools and this segregation is due to the inequalities in admission. Deprived children therefore became dependent on the schooling system but very often help was denied to them. Even in class, the children were segregated into frontbenchers and backbenchers. The study also shown that teachers were ill-prepared to face the demands of the deprived children and this may be due to a demanding curriculum that are imposed to them.

The chapter also depicts the inequity of the policy and curriculum which seems to favour the children from the elite through a strict concentration on the syllabus in order to obtain the best CPE result to get admission to star secondary schools. Despite the

discourses about equity in most policy documents, these are very elusive, as shown by the study. However, trying to change such policy seems very arduous as it favours the decision makers.

The next chapter will analyse the out-of-school and the experiences of the children towards the push-out forces of the in-school construct.

CHAPTER 7

ANALYSIS OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL AND SELF-EXPERIENCES

7.1 Overview

This chapter is a continuation of Chapter 6 where the emerging themes from Chapter 5 are brought into juxtaposition with the review of the literature and the theoretical framework. In Chapter 6 we explored the issues that emerged from the in-school influences that have shown a push-out of children of deprived areas from the education system. In this chapter, the out-of-school influences and the self-experiences of the children are brought in dialogue with the literature review and the theoretical framework. The purpose is to explore the interactions between the different systems proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1994) that may lead to children's disengagement.

7.2 Orientation to Chapter 7

The overview at 7.1 gives an introduction to the chapter linking the previous chapter to this chapter. The orientation in 7.2 gives the direction of the development of the chapter. The chapter is made of three sections, namely section A which analyses the out-of-school influences, section B which analyses the self-experiences of the children and section C provides a new insight as well as the chapter synthesis.

Part 7.3 is an analysis of what is new, surprising and different in the out of school context and the self-experiences of the participants. In part 7.3.1 aims at exploring the forces influencing children's engagement. In 7.3.1.1 the interrelation between the parents, the family and schooling is brought in dialogue with the review of the literature. The relationship is further explored in 7.3.1.1.1 showing the effect of abuse on women and children by the male counterparts. 7.3.1.1.2 explores how men are the boys' role models. As a result, we explore the socialisation of the working-class children in 7.3.1.1.3.

The women's presence and active roles are explored in 7.3.1.2 as I consider them as the unsung heroes in the life experiences of the children. As a result, we focus on the men's reaction to the women's new role in 7.3.1.3. All this family interaction takes place

under the scrutiny of the matriarchs as stabilisers which is considered in 7.3.1.4. the double role of the peers also influenced the engagement process and is explored in 7.3.1.5.

7.3.2 explores the influences of the self-experiences of the children on their disengagement process. 7.3.2.1 focuses on the use of defence mechanisms by the children in front of their ordeals. 7.3.2.2 focuses on the opportunities and agenda of the children and how they influenced the disengagement process. 7.3.2.3 shows how children internalise their oppression and what forces resulted from these analysis.

In 7.4 the new insights are presented and the chapter ends in 7.5 with the chapter synthesis.

SECTION A

7.3 Analysis of the out-of-school influences

Although extant literature places more emphasis on the socially related factors which they believe is the most important influence to children's disengagement, my current study gives a different insight into the influence of the family, parents, friends, neighborhood in the disengagement process. The emergent influences are discussed below.

7.3.1 Out-of-school influences

Out-of-school influences take into consideration the different influences within the family and the environment of the OOSC. The analysis will show how the changing roles in the family influence the children to (dis)engage from schools while at the same time highlighting the push-out forces exerted by external institutions.

7.3.1.1 *The interrelation between parents, family and schooling*

Existing literature attributes children's disengagement to socially related factors such as family structures (Mahalihali, 2014; Naomee, 2013). They suggest that a two-parent family structure is very important in the life experiences of the children as it provides the emotional, educational and behavioural balance that children need for academic success. They also seem to suggest that without a good interpersonal relationship between members of the family, children are likely to disengage. I mentioned that

despite the suggestions in the literature, we do not know exactly the family structures in which OOSC were living and therefore I could not assume that such was the case with our OOSC. The study shows that the participants' family structures are far from the two-parent family structures or the coherent families depicted by extant literature. Because of poverty and for socioeconomic purposes, the family structures of the participants were different from what literature considers to be the 'ideal family'. The study shows that each participant was experiencing different types of family structures at different period in time. However, in most cases, the patriarchs' attitudes towards the women and children were physically and emotionally strenuous, thus directly and indirectly impacting on the life experiences of children. The children and their mothers were constantly physically abused, very often, leading to the mothers leaving the home. Furthermore, the male boys paid little attention to their mothers' physical presence, having more affinity with their fathers, whom they considered as role models. The male children enacted the same pattern of violence that they witnessed at home in school and in society. This violent nature brought them to be tagged as 'children beyond control'. This 'stigma' has dogged them all throughout their schooling experience to the point of having indirectly contributed to push them out of school. In fact, in some cases, their behaviour was responsible for their pushing out of the education system. Were the children socialised by the forms of violence that they endured at home? Did the fathers socialise their off-spring into such types of behaviours?

There are, therefore, two aspects that impact indirectly on the life experiences of children, in relation to dropping out: the first being the physical abuse of the men on women and children, and the second being the socialisation of boys with their fathers as role models. However, this part of the family personal life was never covered in the literature that were consulted, despite the fact that it contributed largely to get children to be pushed out to the point of disengagement. I suggested in chapter 6 that maybe the theoretical framework could have been coupled with a social theory in order to interpret the emerging influences. Thus, I am in a position to justify why I need to use new literature to enhance the analysis.

7.3.1.1.1 *Abuse of women and children*

To explain the attitude of men who use violence, Campbell (1993, p. 105) advances the possibility that the men were victims of violence as children and, according to him, the

children who “observed their fathers’ violence at home are three times more likely to beat their own wife when they marry”. The children in their struggle to survive in a world of abuse and brutality find in their fathers’ action some sort of gratification. The children were aware that men use of violence towards women and themselves is related to their power and desire to control within a patriarchal society. They saw that men feel the need to have the upper hand because there are various spheres of life where men are in control and also to show their masculinity (Hearn, 1996) due to their position in society; men control politics, policy and all walks of life and, as such, are those who decide on the attitudes to adopt against women and children. The need to break up the doll house built by young girls was a feeling of satisfaction and of happiness for some of the children. When men feel that they are being challenged in their gender roles (Harway & O’Neil, 1999), they tend to use violence to re-affirm their ego. Men feel that their position and their social status, as defined by social expectations, are under threat (Morell, 2007). Although the children felt all the brunt of violence in their life, they made use of the same violence in their day-to-day life, especially in schools, whenever they felt an injustice. They were more violent when the injustice emanated from the institution.

However, men’s violence against women is not only a matter of control and dominance but also an offshoot of poverty. As they are living in poor conditions, men find it more difficult to get a job. As such, their position, defined by societal expectation of being a provider to the family, is challenged by the women who find it easier to get a job because they are offered a lower salary than their male counterparts and also because of policy issues (such as proof of character) favouring women employment. That is the reason why men tend to be more self-employed as shown in the study. Extant literature informs us that children’s disengagement is attributed to poverty because they come from low-economic status family (Busgopaul, 2006; Katz, Corlyon, La Placa & Hunter, 2007) but there is no proof of children’s disengagement due to poverty. Most probably the interaction between the parents living in poverty, the attitude of teachers towards deprived children and the policy decisions that do not favour deprived children in their engagement can cause children to disengage. Thus, children are pushed out of school because they are poor.

The women who were parents of the children in this study (and in some cases, as lone parent) worked mostly in the textile industry or as maids or cleaners' jobs that were standardised, hence easier for women (Tandrayen-Ragoobur & Ayriga, 2011). Gender Statistics of Mauritius (2015) informs us that more women are likely to be employees and the average income for women is less than for men. Thus women, in the study, earned a living based on their attendance at work. Absence from work means that they were not paid for the non-working days. In such situations, how can the women absent themselves to meet teachers in schools and get involved in their children's engagement? Society's expectations are that it was the woman's role to look after the studies of children because they were at home. However, in reality, women needed to strive as hard as men for the benefit of their children at home.

The same applied for the men. The requirement for obtaining and producing a character or morality certificate before being employed for a job is quite prohibitive for men as many working-class men may have had a minor judicial encounter during their lifetime and therefore a clear character reference certificate becomes harder to obtain. This built-in policy seems to disadvantage non-employed men to get a decent job. Hence, working-class men content themselves with jobs such as lorry drivers, masons, fishermen, etc. Not possessing a character certificate eliminates the possibility of obtaining a better paying job. This explains the frustration of men vis-a-vis their female partners and their siblings. But that also explains the lack of involvement of working-class parents in the study of their children. That may be a reason why teachers had less contact with parents (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003) as shown in extant literature.

7.3.1.1.2 Men are the boys' role models

In parallel, the study shows that the boys adopted the same attitudes as men in the families. Through their behaviour, men inculcate in their children, especially boys, that violence is gratifying and that aggression pays (Khan, 2006; Campbell, 1993). The study shows that the children suffered from violence, not only at home but also at school and in society. This violence takes the form of corporal punishment, verbal abuse, exclusive measures and disregard from the neighbours and the neighbourhood. Extant literature tells us that children who are bullied feared school and were reluctant to attend school (Ferrel-Smith, 2003). However, the study showed that although children suffer a lot from such forms of violence, they still maintain a calm attitude in class or school or in

society, but there comes a point when they can no longer bear such abuse and injustice and they finally burst out. The acclaim that they received from their friends led them to indulge more and more in violent situations as it was gratifying for them. This shows that not only the home environment but also the school's contributed to the aggressive nature of children (a counter-effect of bullying, combined with the socialisation of boys). The study shows that the more the children grew up, the more aggressive they became in school as well as in their close environment, since their abuse and injustice came from the family, the neighbourhood and the school. Very often, the male family members interfered when the children could not defend themselves, thus showing the importance of their masculinity. The children often find themselves in push-out situations in schools where such aggressive behaviour is condemned simply because they were non-conformists. Children are often labelled as 'child beyond control' when they show aggressive attitudes and such labels lead to symbolic exclusion. Classrooms where there are a lot of aggressive children are difficult to manage by teachers who often resort to coercive measures to exercise control which, in the end, very often results in increasing the negative behaviour patterns of the children. This study therefore shows us three things: that children who are bullied do not fear school and disengage; that, in contrast to what literature tells us, that parents' aggression leads to aggression patterns in children, that the school also contributes to negative behaviour in children up to the point of them being pushed out of school. That is why teachers believe that working-class children are prone to be aggressive. Built-in disciplinary policies in the school curriculum aim at excluding non-conformists. This data seems to confirm that while schools externalise the source of aggression to family backgrounds, they themselves could be regarded as responsible for fostering aggressive responses from children.

The children also felt challenged and frustrated in their quest for equality in school and in the classroom. Their queries remain unanswered and very often they were challenged and hurt deep down in their self-esteem. In extant literature, the children were appealing for more respect and more justice from teachers, but they never received either. They were never taught how to react to challenges and they responded in the only way they knew which gave them satisfaction. Their aspirations for better job prospects vanished when they were made to feel unwanted in school. Being pushed out gives a sense of non-belongingness, of being degraded. That is why the children's job aspirations were so low, as shown in the study. The boys have taken their fathers as role

model and will most likely perpetuate the same pattern later in life. The theoretical framework used missed the social aspect that has emerged and that is why the collection of data that is yielding issues not covered by the extant literature. The analytical lens has allowed an exploration to the least detail of the life experiences of the children to ascertain that the general belief that poverty or socioeconomic factors were responsible for children's disengagement was only a superficial view of the dropping out phenomenon.

7.3.1.1.3 *The socialisation of working-class children*

Extant literature tends to show that family structures are often responsible for children's disengagement from schools. Elkin and Hendel (1978) tell us that the family settings are important in the socialisation process of children. However, the theoretical framework has not allowed a deep exploration of the influences that the socialisation process has on disengagement. The differences in the socialisation process of working-class and middle-class children seem to be an important issue that emerged from the study through the analytical framework, and this will be further developed in Chapter 8.

The study shows that the pattern of experiences of working-class children and that of middle-class children were not similar. Middle-class children were brought up in what Lareau (2002, p. 748) called a "concerted cultivation", i.e. middle-class parents engage their children in various activities that go beyond daily family life in order to acquire life skills which are valued and rewarded in formal schooling. By so doing, they develop a particular language use in order to develop reasoning. Working-class children, on the other hand, are brought up in what she calls the "accomplishment of natural development" (Lareau, 2002, p. 748) where working-class children are often left on their own to develop their own special talents, as long as they are provided with food, shelter and love. Thus, both sets of children are equipped with different tools to negotiate their path. However, when it came to language use Lareau (2002, p. 748) found that middle-class children's language was more elaborate, with more explicit explanations of the details, while working-class children's use of language in their conversation was less extended. Working-class parents and children do not "cultivate conversation" (Lareau, 2002, p. 748) as opposed to middle-class parents and children. The children in the study claimed that they enjoyed mathematics classes as opposed to the language-based subjects which seemed to be more difficult. In mathematics there

were only numbers to deal with. Bernstein (1971, pp. 59-60) explains that difference in language expression between the middle-class and the working-class by the fact that middle-class children more often use “elaborated codes”, a mode of expression which makes use of more alternatives, and working-class children use more often “restricted codes”, a mode with limited alternatives. However, the use of language codes in the education system seems to favour elaborated codes rather than accepting the fact that restricted codes are also very rich in content and more direct regarding a specific theme. If such is the case, then it claims that working-class children are doomed to drop out because schools favour a type of language code to the detriment of another one. However, the study also shows that working-class children were able to make abstraction of such difficulties, especially where the classes were more heterogeneous (7.3.1.5), thus showing that the language code theory may not be applicable in this case. We rather believe that the difficulty to acquire language skills by working-class children is a matter of wrong transmission of language skills by the transmitter of knowledge.

The study shows that children, especially working-class children, at a very early age (since pre-primary schooling) have difficulties in language learning. It is true that working-class children are disadvantaged in the learning process as they are trying to make sense of a language to which they are least exposed. But is the problem the children and the language codes, or is it more a teaching/learning process issue? The country is a multi-ethnic and a multilingual society whose main aim after independence was to be more efficient in the economic arena and one way forward was to maintain the use of English and French, as medium of communication. Even though the children found it difficult to learn both languages which were examinable at the CPE, their effort was probably greater than middle-class children’s, since they were cut off from the use of spoken and written English. Furthermore, the Creole language they used with their familiar groups was not standardised one that could be easily translated. In certain ethnic groups and regions, the term “gagn so laz”²⁷ cannot be directly translated into French and English. Encountering the term “birthday” during examination would

²⁷ Literally: obtained his age. In English: his birthday

completely disorientate the child. When do children learn to make the transitions between the different languages, they are accustomed to? The study shows that the transition cannot happen at home and that such transitions are done in school.

Ball (2011) says that children are capable of learning a second and even third language at an early age on the condition that the language of instruction is in the mother tongue throughout their primary schooling. If the transition is too fast, it could cause children to lose motivation and eventually drop out. This transition is performed by teachers, very often unqualified, in the pre-primary schools and these teachers are ill-prepared to implement such a policy (Ankiah-Gangadeen & Samuel, 2014). These same teachers have each a different home experience on language pedagogy which influences their practice, and the informal home experience is as powerful as the formal experiences (Ankiah-Gangadeen & Samuel, 2014). This influences the transition between the mother tongue and the second and third language development in children as children in pre-primary schools are taught these languages.

In the primary sector, especially the ZEP schools, Payneeandee (2014) tells us that teachers are teaching the language (English) too mechanistically and as such the students are not given the chance to write sentences. Teachers believe that the problems of learning the language are child-related; hence, the transition is not taking place, and this is to the detriment of working-class children who do not have the opportunity to catch up or follow-up at home or in private tuition. Teachers' attitudes (6.3.1.1.5) and the curriculum and policy (6.3.1.1.6) push the children out from the system, especially in schools with a high contingent of working-class children. The study shows that in ZEP schools, the children were not given the appropriate attention when they requested such help. Whereas when the classes were more heterogeneous, help was provided to the less able. This point of view emerged as a result of the analysis of the data collected and is not explored by extant literature, thus showing the limitations of the theoretical framework which is more concerned with the factors rather than the process of disengagement. Most probably this could have been solved if the theoretical framework was coupled with a socio-linguistic theory.

Once again, the theoretical framework that I used did not allow an incursion into the socialisation patterns of disadvantaged children but with new literature, I was able to explore the pull-in forces exerted by middle-class children in the life of the working-

class children. It also shows the extent of push-out forces from schools just because working-class children have a different socialisation pattern (Ercole, 2009).

7.3.1.2 *Unsung heroes in the life experiences of children*

The study has highlighted the role of the women in the life experiences of the children. I was referring to their roles as not only of being a housewife but also of being a breadwinner. The mothers had taken up the gender role usually attributed to men. In the study, all the mothers were working mothers, thus shouldering the blame that they were very often absent in the children's life. They were not only the bread-winners, a task traditionally incumbent upon men, but they were additionally attending to their traditional role as carers, cooks, wives and nurturers to the children. Although extant literature tells us that in a re-partnered family where the siblings are living with the biological mother and a social father (Amato, 1987; Oyerinde, 2001), it is the father who is the breadwinner, this study shows the contrary. And whenever women fall out of a relationship, they most often get the custody of their offspring. The mothers had not only to nurture their children but also to attend to their needs, both at home and at school. This puts the women in a very vulnerable situation where they have to sometimes sacrifice the care given to their children in order to start over a new relationship. Their children find themselves unattended and placed in foster care or in shelter care or, at times, left in the custody of grandparents, very often grandmothers.

The study also shows that when the mother is living under the matriarchal roof, then the task of nurturing the children usually falls to the grandmother in the absence of the working mother. It seems that when families live in poverty, there is a role change that occurs, in that the mother assumes the responsibilities usually assigned to men, and the grandmothers those of caring for and nurturing the children, a role traditionally assigned to the mothers. This change of roles, which has not been revealed by extant literature, is very often interpreted by society as being a sort of neglect from the parents and is therefore the reason why working-class children underachieve. Literature tends to show that traditionally, the mothers who were housewives were also expected to follow the children's academic journey (Appavoo, 2014) in the absence of the father from home.

But the study shows a different role pattern that exists in extended families. Although women easily get a job, they were willing to accept a lower income for their

participation in unskilled labour. This income is not sufficient to attend to the needs of the children when women choose to have an independent life. Very often women enter into a new relationship to “keep the pot boiling”. However, it has been seen that, due to their status in society, women are considered to be the subordinates of men. Furthermore, since very often they reside in an extended family under the firm hand of a matriarch (see Chapter 5), in the matriarch’s house, they attend to their traditional roles as well as their acquired roles. The women were never ‘liberated’ despite being the breadwinner of the family. Does that therefore explain why women leave the house even though this separation is detrimental to the children? Is it because this subordinated role is learnt from childhood at home, in school, through the media, in social and in religious places and is deeply anchored in our society? Children learn their gendered roles from a very young age and that the woman’s role is to be a housewife (Dovor, 2001). Femininity is defined as being nurturing, sensitive and emotional (Slavkin & Stright, 2000) whereas masculinity is viewed as assertive, aggressive and independent (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). However, the study shows a role pattern different from the traditional roles (see Figure 7.1, p. [288284](#)). This situation places women in a very vulnerable and subjugated state of dependency and, most probably, this is perceived by their children as being a sign of weakness as compared with the matriarchs’ omnipotent powers. This changing role and complex game of power explaining the attitudes of men, women, matriarchs and the children in influencing the experiences of the children sheds new light on the different relationships occurring within the family setting that explains why children are disconcerted as to who rules the family, and this most probably brings them closer to the matriarchs. This is why, at the death of the grandmothers, they are prepared to let go as they have lost the only anchor to stability. This aspect of the extended family’s relation to children’s engagement is not covered by extant literature but we can see that it contributes to the life experiences of the children. Most probably the use of a social theory together with the theoretical framework would have allowed such relationships to emerge.

7.3.1.3 *Men’s reaction to women’s new role*

By women assuming different newly acquired roles in modern society, men feel that they have lost their traditional gender role to women. Furthermore, they find that they are not able to exchange their own role into giving care to their children. Hence,

despite the fact that women have a double role, there is the perception that women devote less time to their children. Other institutions such as the school and society also view women in the same light (Kohen, 1981).

Another aspect of the study also shows that women, through the newly acquired status of being working women, have started to become more independent and, consequently, less dependent on men. Being wage earners, women, according to this study, were determined, in some cases, not to accept any more violence from their husbands, and were able to leave the matriarch's house and live on their own, with or without their children. This pattern of life of the women tend to perpetuate in the life experiences of girls as shown in the study. The study showed in the case of one girl participant that she tried to be autonomous and claimed an independence though she was still dependent on the social father. This situation ended in her being sued for aggression on the social father, thus contributing to her decision to end her schooling. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the women had independence, they were not autonomous and they did not have full ability to influence household affairs (Dyson & Moore, 2014). The matriarchs were the sole decision makers where family matters were concerned as explained in 7.3.1.4). The study shows that men had power over the wife and children but not on the matriarchs who chose to support the children, very often the eldest son in the family.

7.3.1.4 *The matriarchs as stabilisers*

The study also shows that there is a relationship between the grandmothers, the mothers and the fathers, a relationship which was beneficial to the grandchildren from the matriarchs. These relationships were explained in Chapter 5. Most of the matriarchs were paternal grandmothers and the relationship that existed between them and the children was beneficial in strengthening the children's resilience. Szinovacz (1998) suggests that the bond between the grandmothers and the children may be more prominent because grandmothers live longer than grandfathers. The study shows that, in most cases, the grandmothers were still alive and this is confirmed by statistics that show that women have a longer life expectancy than men (World Health Organisation, 2015). I posit that most probably the children were closer to the matriarchs because the matriarchs were the holders of power, being landowners and being the most powerful persons in decision making in the family. However, the grandmothers in the study were never in conflict with their daughters-in-law as suggested by the narratives, even though

extant literature says the contrary. In many cases the matriarchs supplemented the actions of the mothers and vice-versa. But the mothers were more in a corrector role (waiting with a hose-pipe) while the grandmothers had a better role of nurturance as opposed to what is called “the absent generation” (Hanks, 1997). The grandparents saw this as a chance to “parent again”. Moreover, the influences of the grandparents are very subtle but long-lasting and their impact is apparent in after years (Hanks, 1997).

However, the relationship between the matriarchs and the fathers was more tumultuous. The men were living under the roof of the matriarchs and although they considered themselves, in their gender role, as heads of the family, all important decisions that concerns the family as a whole, were still taken by the matriarchs. These decisions concerned mainly the children in the family. The male adults, who asserted their authority towards their wives and children, were completely helpless when the matriarchs took decisions. Caught between an authoritative matriarch and a more emancipated wife who has taken over the role of men as breadwinner, the men lose their ego. If they feel that their ego is being shattered by external factors out of their control, they feel emasculated. Men’s gender roles are threatened by emasculation and to re-establish their superiority over women, they resort to violence, domestic violence (Harway & O’Neil, 1999). This reality has been brought to light by the actions of feminist movements but, unfortunately, attempts to remedy the situation come against a wall of indifference (Romito, 2008). The study shows how the male relatives of the children were indifferent to the violence that they went through. This situation shows a different pattern as compared to that in 7.3.1.3. Power is distributed from up to down in the hierarchy of an extended family whereas economic survival takes a bottom-up distribution. Fortunately, men dare not retaliate against their mothers and the children feel safe under the matriarch’s wings. However, the children reproduce the same patterns of aggression in their environment.

The out-of-school influences show a change in the role of the family structures because the analytical lens has allowed for the possibility to scrutinise relationships between the different members of the parents and family in the process of disengagement. As mentioned above, the use of a social theory together with the theoretical framework would have a lowed further exploration of the issue. The new role pattern in the family in Figure 7.1 shows how the matriarchs have a pull-in force on the children and how,

because of their socioeconomic background, the families of the OOSC are made to be the scapegoats of a push-out force exerted by the other institutional factors. The analysis of the out-of-school influences, through new literature, allowed an incursion into the world of OOSC to show that disadvantaged children do not disengage but are the collateral victims of an exclusive education policy on one hand and of their social status on the other hand. Both contribute to push them out of school.

7.3.1.5 *Double role of peers*

The study also shows that the friends of our participants, whether in school or in the environment, had an influence on the course chosen by the children. Extant literature describes peer influence as very important in the life experiences of school children. Herald-Brown et al (2008) exposed these influences as being responsible for school engagement/disengagement. They proposed three types of influences: peer group rejection, friendship and peer victimisation (see 2.4.2). Veiga et al. (2014) talk of members acquiring the group characteristics. But the study revealed a class-status influence in peer relationships. The theoretical framework did allow enough space to explore how class-status influences engagement/disengagement of working-class children. I therefore referred to further literature.

In the study, the peers' influence, of a double nature, was very noticeable. We have seen that friends can be from within their natural geographical neighbourhood of the OOSC, as well as from school. Primary schools in Mauritius admit children from different walks of life, which means that sometimes working-class children and middle-class children are in the same classroom. The study shows that in schools where there is a fair balance of middle-class and working-class children, the former tend to pull up the latter towards achievement and keep them in school. In fact, literature shows that children's achievement depends largely on the characteristics of the other students (Coleman et al., 1966, Norman & Dowling, 2010) rather than on their own characteristics. This suggests that achievement is dependent on group interaction rather than being an individual effort. Brown (1990) suggests that the dominant persons in a peer group can impact positively or negatively on students' achievement. This explains why some disadvantaged children succeed while others disengage. The need to affiliate with peer groups sometimes drives children to choose to show allegiance to peers so that they do not show what Fordham (1988) calls "acting white" which means behaving like whites,

in American schools, who believed that the Blacks cannot achieve, and the Blacks are conditioned to this belief thus doubting their ability. In the study, the term 'acting middle' could be used to refer to the term used by Fordham (1988). Peer pressure becomes more important to them in order to show their solidarity to their class rather than academic achievement. But this situation is not necessarily true as far as the study is concerned. A strong middle-class contingent of children can change the feeling that working-class children cannot achieve, thus creating a counter-force to what Fordham (1988) advocates. Working-class children's reaction to peers was also as important as how middle-class children reacted. The study shows how the participants were struggling as to which group of peers to affiliate with. Not affiliating with their own specific group gave them a feeling of guilt. Possibilities exist for children to adhere to one group or the other and the study shows that through achievement and academic success, the children gained in popularity and self-esteem. Well matured working-class children make a subtle choice of both groups of friends.

However, if the children chose to affiliate with their own group, they felt that they did not fit into the school community because as Willis (1977) argued, in his seminal study, that the school symbolised for them middle-class values and norms to which they did not want to adhere. The school also valued white-collar jobs which were not masculine enough and did not give them scope enough to project their masculinity. Children in the study had the choice to affiliate with one group or the other, but the choice depends on how strong the contingent of middle-class children is as opposed to working-class children. On one hand they gain in self-esteem and are therefore pulled in, whereas, on the other hand, they become anti-conformist and reject the white helping hand, which tends to show that when schools are homogeneous in class population, the children's affiliation tends to pull in working-class children, whereas when they are less so, the tendency is more that of pulling out from school. We therefore see again a class-status connotation to the study of OOSC, which suggests that a social support theory would have been useful together with the theoretical framework.

That raises the question of what is more beneficial for working-class children, homogeneous or heterogeneous classes. The segregation of children admitted in the normal and the ZEP schools is considered as a form of ability grouping where working-class children are separated from middle-class children. Although streaming is banned by

law, the separation of children into normal and ZEP schools is a form of streaming as in the ZEP schools CPE pass rate is less than 40%. Garmoran (2002) tells us that when students (hence schools) are separated by achievement levels, there is also a tendency that segregation is performed in terms of race, social class and ethnicity, which reinforces the study of Gill (2012) and Asgarally (1997). This reinforces the findings from 6.3.1.1.1 and 6.3.1.1.2. Thus, classes tend to be more homogeneous in ZEP schools, with a higher concentration of working-class children. However, when classes are heterogeneous, students are of mixed abilities and, hence, according to Garmoran (2002), classes have a tendency to be less disturbed by children and their academic content is delivered more easily thus having a positive consequence on children. The study shows that there is less misbehaviour and more teacher engagement in a heterogeneous class.

SECTION B

7.3.2 Self-experiences

The study shows that the children in the study were not passive and non-resolute in facing their day-to-day experiences of life. They were aware of their own difficulties but refused to be pulled into hopelessness. Their everyday life was a matter of facing their adversities by using the means at their disposal as opposed to the passive spectators of their disengagement as suggested by extant literature. However, extant literature from Rumberger (2001), Foliano et al. (2010), Murray et al. (2004) do not provide an extensive literature on the individual's involvement in the process of dropping out. At times, individually related issues are always related to either social issues or to institutional issues but are not analysed in relation with the socially and institutional related factors. Thus, there is a need to refer to further literature that gives an insight into the relationship of the participants with the social and institutional and vice-versa. This might be one limitation of the theoretical framework.

7.3.2.1 *Use of defence mechanisms*

In school, the children were helpless towards the conformity of the system to which they were not used. Towards such aggressiveness from a place providing knowledge, they responded with the only tool that they have learnt, i.e. by resorting to violence. Unlike

middle-class children who would question actions from the school and bring in their parents for support, working-class children did not have such support from their parents and they never even reported cases of aggression for fear of further aggression by their own parents. However, none of the participants showed signs of disengaging due to poor academic performances, despite the fact that extant literature claims that bullied children tend to be more prone to disengagement (Foliano et al., 2010). In fact, the complexities of the learning process motivated them to engage themselves more and more using coping mechanisms. Although the participants knew that they could not change the stressful events of their life, they chose to use emotional coping mechanisms to lessen the emotional impact of stress (Somaiya, Kolpakwar, Faye & Kamath, 2015). In some cases, the participants were using passive avoidance whereby they avoided asking questions and querying because they knew that teachers would not answer. Instead of losing face, they restrained from querying. Leaving the classroom, confining oneself to solitariness were forms of avoidance used by children. Others engaged in active avoidance; even though they knew that they would be punished for their actions. This study shows that even though existing literature attributes the following factors to school dropouts, namely social factors, school factors and individual factors, we have not seen the effect of individual factors as contributing to school dropout. When Whilms (2003) says that children may be disaffected because of low literacy achievement or because of poor family background, we have seen that such is not the case. In fact, the different coping strategies used by the children give an element of hope in that the children never had the intention to disengage from school. The impact of this element of hope shows that, despite push-out issues from the schools and the pull-in issues by peers and stabilisers in their life, the children have a possibility to mediate their own engagement in the process. If they are provided with equal opportunities, children are capable of either achieving in schools or even being prepared to face life. Nevertheless, children find it easier to pull out as, for them, those schools do not serve their purpose. The elitist pedagogy being used is one that does not allow time for working-class children to adapt and to cope with the adversities of family and school life. A pedagogy that is used by Paley (1986) or by Boynton and Boynton (2005) would be more adapted to their needs rather than that of Hancock and Zubrick (2003). Teaching working-class children requires that there should be a consensus of using what Hooks (1994) calls an engaged pedagogy, to teach in a manner to respect and care for the children in our

custody and to make learning enjoyable and meaningful. We do believe that, within this elitist framework in which our educational system evolves, there is room for a pedagogy of hope whereby teachers are more interested in the student's concerns rather than their own. The constraint of the curriculum and policy may be the causes for such a situation as seen in 6.3.2.1. At various parts of the study, the element of hope was visible from teachers, especially when the children were in a situation of discomfort. The theoretical framework coupled with a social justice theory could have picked up such issues and through the analytical lens we were able to pick up these issues by allowing a full incursion in the life of the children. However, as these issues were not covered by extant literature, the latest findings have emerged from new literature.

7.3.2.2 *Opportunities and agenda*

The study shows that the children were quite responsive when opportunities were offered to them and this reaction is not one of disengaged children. The participants responded positively when the opportunities offered to them went beyond the comfort zone of the school premises. Despite the factors that push out children of school, some teachers personalise their teaching towards particular students as suggested by Paley (1986) and Boynton and Boynton (2005). However, this personalisation of the teaching process is not sustained over time due to several factors such as children's mobility, transition and even significant others' mobility. The greatest barrier to providing personalised tutoring to children is teachers' beliefs. Extant literature explains that teachers believed that it was not important to build a relationship with the children for them to engage in schooling. The study showed that when teachers build a strong relationship, their pedagogy change from that of strictly sticking to the curriculum (Hancock & Zubrick, 2015) to one that explores the curiosity of children (Paley, 1986). Caprara et al. (2006) tell us that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs can bring a high level of motivation and educational attainment in children. Teachers with high self-efficacy beliefs are capable of innovating their practices, getting students to engage more responsibility in the learning tasks and keeping the children on target. At the same time, the children's self-efficacy belief is also boosted and the study shows that the children's responses were more positive to learning and staying in. This belief has the potential to pull in children towards achievement, not necessarily to achieve high but to stay in. However, the study shows that teachers' interventions were visible only when the home

situations of the children were precarious. In most cases, intervention from teachers and significant others emerged more out of empathy.

As the opportunities were not sustained, the children shifted their priorities from academic to life-skills achievement. This transition took place at a time between the CPE examinations and before being pushed out of school, which shows how childrens' expectations change over time. In one case, the learning of life skills brought more motivation to the child so that push-out effects had no force. Volane (2014) advocates that some subjects have the potential to draw children away from the possibility to build knowledge, skills and attitudes which serve as platform for the acquisition of life skills. Does that therefore mean that working-class children prefer life skills rather than academic skills? If such is the case, does that mean that our school curriculum does not offer skills that will be of use to the children in everyday life? We have seen in 6.3.2.1 that the curriculum and policy are more centred around the acquisition of academic skills that children will use in order to attain another level of academic achievement rather than imparting skills that children would need to use in everyday life. The changes from a mono-crop economy to textile, tourism and eventually to a financial and technological economy mean that the curriculum offers more possibility to children to follow the trends needed in the market economy. As working-class children cannot cope with that curriculum, their priority is to develop life skills which are not taught in schools. But as they see the differences in living between the other classes and their own, they are prepared to make use of street skills to alleviate their poverty. When children have been reared in shelters, foster homes and in precarious families, there comes a time where they need to depend on themselves to earn a living, and they resort to their experiences by making use of their street skills. Despite the lack of reliable statistics regarding this issue in Mauritius, it is a fact that there is a rejuvenation of larceny and delinquency, although such increase cannot be attributed to working-class children. The study shows that two participants had a delinquency problem and such delinquency occurs among children less than 16 years of age. The study also showed that the young participants have had a taste of illicit substances during their primary schooling. These delinquency problems, in turn, are used by appropriate media sources (especially social-media) to project the idea of a delinquent youth culture. This reinforces the idea that such children pose a threat to society thus nullifying the possible self-efficacy aspirations that others could hope for them. However, delinquency

is not characteristic of the working-class; it is generalised. Hence, why is it that middle-class or upper-class children are not labelled as beyond control and are not sent to shelters or rehabilitation centres? Schissel (1997) says that “the news media especially shapes the way we think about things that are foreign and frightening to us, hence the general populace perceives modern youth as increasingly violent and dangerous” (p. 23). According to him, the media has the tendency to inflate certain types of information so that what is feared by the public will be subject to more attention by the same public or consumer. Hence, the coverage of certain events is presented to the public with either an element of joy (the laureate and success of the elite) or an element of fear when it comes to children beyond control. The written and spoken media are full of examples of children who have misbehaved in school and it is very often the children who are transferred to other informal institutions and, although such cases are referred to the Ombudsperson for Children, little is heard about sanctions (if any) against the teachers or the school administration. If children are transferred occasionally for such reasons, they finally end up in informal schools, with the approval of the Ministry of Education. Thus the study highlights the efforts put in by working-class children who, through their own agenda, stay in schools because of their needs to acquire life skills but against the joint efforts from the institutions and media sources to push them out, they are compelled to leave.

Children have adapted themselves with the various changes over the years but what has made the difference is the support that they get from those that are closer to them: their peers, their family support, the teachers and significant people around them. Although literature talks about children’s own disengagement but have not been able to show how it happens, the analysis shows that children have the capacity to adapt to the changes when the right conditions are offered to them and that children are pushed out of the system rather than disengage. Even children who have not attended a complete course of primary education found pleasure in schooling rather than wishing to pull out. The children did not have a low locus of control and did not blame anyone for their failure as suggested by extant literature. Continued failure or neglect from teachers was not a reason for the children to abdicate, as claimed by literature, but in fact was beneficial as they developed other survival skills.

7.3.2.3 *Internalised oppression*

We have seen in the study how children who are oppressed at home, by the environment and in institutions have the tendency to group with other children in the same situation. When the children no longer have the stability offered by their significant others, they tend to enact the negative stereotypes with which they were tagged. The significant person in the life of the children may have died, moved away due to mobility and when they no longer have that attachment they turn to their peers for support. The children have, during their early childhood, tried to be good learners but have been tagged and labelled as children beyond control and negative learners. By negative learners I mean children who refuse to learn or children who do not conform to schooling principles. As time goes by, the attitudes of the children change from trying to be good learners to enacting what society in general think about them. Since they believe that they were bad learners and troublesome children, their agenda changed from acquiring life skills to acquiring street skills. Teaming up with other oppressed children leads them to enact their distress, in the form of self-invalidation, self-doubt, solitariness (Padilla, 2004). Use of violence against other groups of children in school is an example of group oppression, whereas living a solitary life far from friends is a form of individual oppression. Fortunately, such actions are not necessarily true for all children who are oppressed. It happens that through peers' interaction, (7.3.1.5) children are pulled in rather than pushed out.

However, the reactions of teachers and school administrators were also embedded in their (the teachers and school administrators) sub-conscious where they were told or had lived difficult experiences with working-class families, parents or children. Padilla (2004) says that internalised oppression starts as an external factor to the individual when powerful individuals initiate what is called a "chain of oppression" through racist or discriminatory (class consciousness - my addition) behaviour. The oppressors have already biased opinions on the subjects that they are called to come in contact with. This is confirmed by the work of Appavoo (2014), Pyneeandy (2014) and supported by Ercole (2009) drawing from studies similar studies in Mauritius on teachers' commitment and expectations of high and low flyers, where teachers are prejudiced about the parents of working-class children and the children themselves. This, therefore, contributed to the children being oppressed thus pushing them out of the system.

SECTION C

7.4 New insight

When I started by studying the OOSC in the Mauritian educational context, I realised that the term OOSC was known only within the non-formal institutions environment as if the term was taboo. Such was not the case when I went through international literature. Abounding literature on school dropouts and children's disengagement from school presents several factors to explain why children dropout from school despite compulsory education being in force. According to literature children drop out because they disengage from school. This disengagement was due to institutional, social and individual factors. However, if this was true, I wanted to find out how the process of disengagement takes place in the life of children. This was the reason why I chose Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological theory of child development to ensure that all the components of the children's life are tapped. However, there was a gap in literature on how children go about managing these experiences happening in their life and disengagement. This gap is now filled with my study. This thesis shows a complex combination of the life of the children both outside and within the school context with their experiences that contribute to push them out of school. The systemic inequity that prevails in the policy, the perceptions that middle-class decision makers have on working-class family and children all lead to the ultimate decision where children are made to disengage. However, the study also shows that children have the capacity to rebound from their mishaps and, with appropriate support, are able to defy the odds.

In this chapter I highlight the different forms of influences that have emerged from Chapter 5 in the out-of-school and self-experience contexts and I have analysed the influences that were new, different and surprising. At the same time, I have also answered the CQ3 which is "why do the life experiences influence or not dropping out in the Mauritian context in the way they do or don't". The different influences were engaged with the literature and the theoretical framework. In the analysis, I was able to explore why men behave the way they do towards women and children, how the matriarchs were the pillars of the family setting and how they were important in sustaining the children in difficulty. In Chapter 6, I also explained how the school, as an institution, could be a determinant influence in the life of children, and how the peers were pertinent in supporting children at risk. I have analysed the role played by the

curriculum and policy decision in pushing working-class children, and I have shown how this is related to the attitudes of teachers and school administrators. At the same time, the influences are bi-directional in the sense that despite all seeming to point to the push-out effect from the social, institutional and individual elements, there are also opposite forces in the life of the participants that act as pull-in forces to keep them in the system. Although one or the other forces causes a balance or an imbalance in the experiences of the children, the analysis of the self-experiences of the children shows that the child learns to mediate between the two acting forces depending on his own agenda. I have also noticed that children who have had a 'taste of middle-class experience' during their childhood have a tendency to resist more the push-out forces. The capacity to resist and the opportunities that exist for the disadvantaged children bring an element of hope for children who are pushed out of the educational system. However, are schools and educationalists in Mauritius capable of transforming the schooling system to get rid of the element of continuity and change? I wonder if the term "dropout" or "disengage" is appropriate when we talk of children who have completed their primary education. In the next chapter, I will conclude my study and, at the same time, provide the contributions of the study. The limitations and possibilities for future research will also be exposed.

7.5 Chapter synthesis

In this chapter, a further analysis of the influences in the life of the OOSC was carried out, exploring the influences in the out-of-school context and the self. From these influences emerged the forces that act on the process of dropping out or disengagement of children. Several push-out and pull-in forces were seen to act in the life experiences of the children which give an idea why children do not actually disengage from their studies but are pushed out from the system. However, opportunities existed that pulled-the children back into the system. The children are able, through their own experiences acquired over the years to mediate and counter-balance the push out forces and not disengage. This provides an element of hope as if children do not disengage, then possibilities of success is possible through pull-in factors. The next chapter will put an end to the study by concluding the journey.

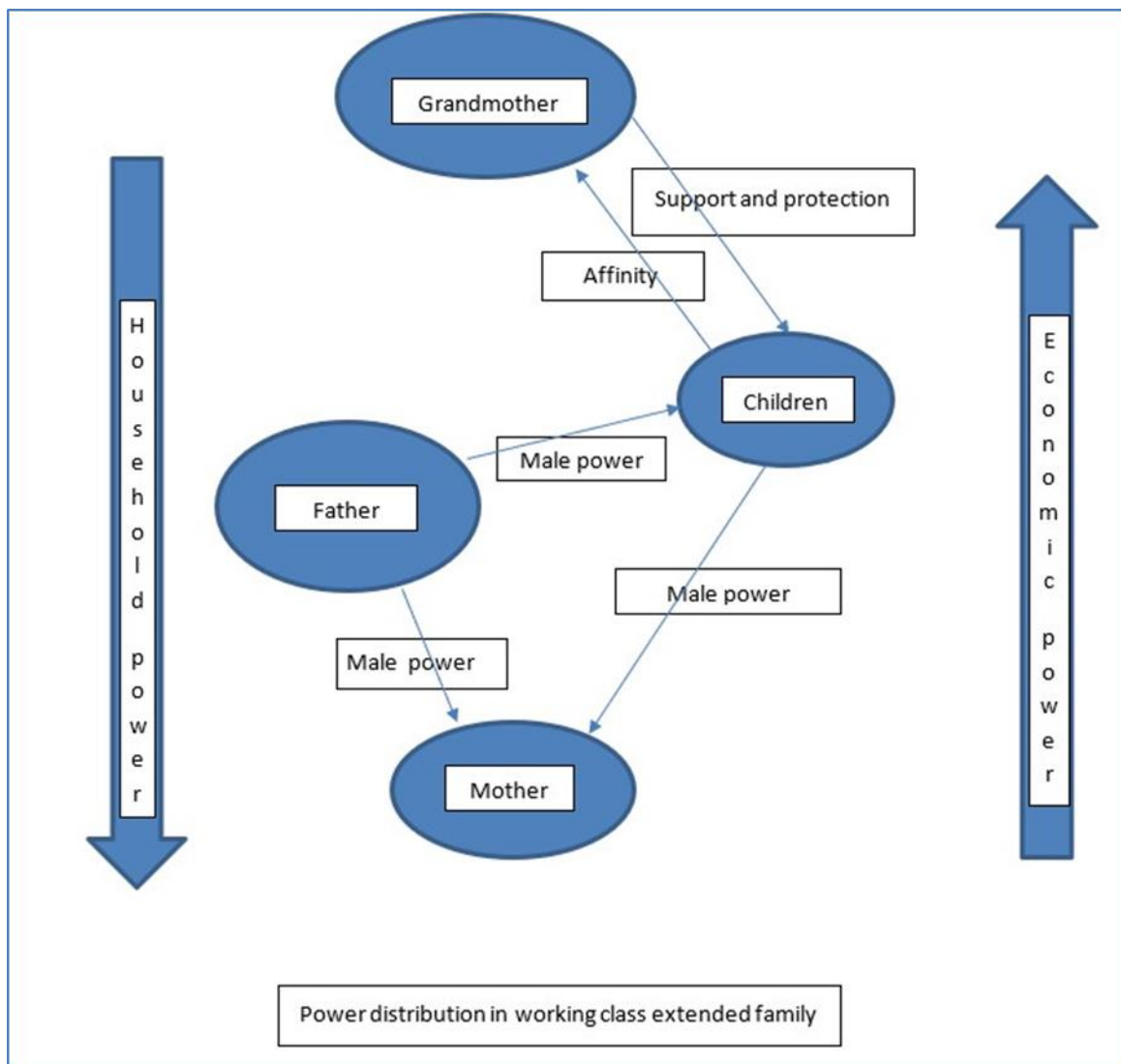


Figure 7.1: Power distribution in working-class extended family

CHAPTER 8

OOSC AND MEDIATED ENGAGEMENT

8.1 Overview

Through an analysis of the data in relation to the original theoretical lens of the study, the previous chapter revealed insights into several forces that influence disengagement of children from schools. This analysis reinforced the purpose of the study, which was to explore the processes and the influences in the lives of out of school children. These insights show that children themselves do not disengage from schools alone but are co-opted into doing so by varied *push-out forces*. These push-out forces mainly emanate from the institutional contexts of formal schooling. Despite the fact that the literature attributes children's disengagement from school to individual, social and institutional factors, it has not been able to tell us how children negotiate and mediate these forces in their everyday lives. The tendency of the extant literature is to overemphasise the existence of these external forces that construct children as largely the victims of externality and the systemic character of schooling. This reinforces a view of the endemic character of inequity which prevails in the policy-making processes and policy decisions within the broader system and the institutional systems. Children then tend to internalise these systemic forces that are predisposed to pushing them out of school. However, this study has revealed the mutual existence of both internal and external forces that influence the experiences of the OOSC, and culminate in learners disengaging from the schooling system.

The analysis of the field data for this study further showed that there are also pull-in forces that emanate from the family, the environment and peers. These forces are mediated by the children's own personal and experiential agenda as over time, the children developed defence mechanisms that guided them in their final choices in relation to their contextual spaces. Pull-in forces emanate from some elements within the broader local community that support children's sustainability with schooling, but also within the school environment in the form of supportive peers who consciously enable the children to reconstruct their potentiality to remain and prevent disengaging

from schooling. The previous chapter has allowed me to better understand the phenomenon of dropping out (or the process of disengagement as presented by extant literature) within the primary school sector and has assisted me to reach my own conclusions in this study. The findings give a new stance in understanding the different forces with which disadvantaged children have to juggle to remain within the schooling system.

8.2 Orientation to Chapter 8

This chapter concludes the study with a brief introduction presented in section 8.1, which highlights the journey travelled. Section 8.2 outlines the structure of this chapter, while 8.3 foregrounds the thesis on the mediated engagement of OOSC. The thesis argues for a reconceptualisation of children who disengage not as doomed victims, but also as potentially capable of negotiating elements of hope for an alternative future. Section 8.4 focuses on the analytical lens of naive hope, which brings disillusion to the indigent children, and critical hope, which challenges policies that are deceptive. Section 8.5 foregrounds how children mediate their engagement, rather than disengage from school. 8.6 focuses on the methodological, contextual and theoretical influence of this re-negotiation of experiential forces. Section 8.7 emphasises the implications of this thesis for policy and theory as well as for contextual practical spaces within the home and school. This section is followed by acknowledging the study's limitations in section 8.8, and the recommendations for future research in section 8.9. Section 8.10 closes the thesis with a synthetic view of this study's contribution.

SECTION A

8.3 The thesis: OOSC and mediated engagement

8.3.1 Existing literature review

This study concerns mainly children who have participated in the Certificate of Primary Education examination that marks the end of primary schooling, who have failed to make the grade and who have dropped out of school. The original literature reviewed in Chapter 2 argued that children drop out of school because of poverty, poor health and nutrition, disability, gender, ethnicity, child labour, migration, geographical disadvantages, cultural factors and situations of fragility and conflict. This position is

advanced by the Global Partnership in Education (2011). Furthermore, extant literature advocates that dropping out is a matter of children's personal disengagement or from lack of engagement with the schooling enterprise. . This presents the view that children most probably dropped out of school due to social, individual and institutional factors or even economical factors (Stephens, 1998). However, neither the Global Partnership literature, nor the reviewed literature on the factors for dropping out explored in-depth the *negotiation of the relationships* between the social, individual and institutional issues that ultimately force children out of school. For example, according to the CREATE study framework (2011, p. 12), these children are categorised as children “who fail to transit to secondary education as a result of failing to be selected, being unable to afford costs, or located far from a secondary school, or otherwise excluded”. The CREATE study usefully developed five zones of exclusion to look at transition stages across the many dropout phases of learners disengaging with school (explained in Chapter 1). This “zones of exclusion” model was directed towards encouraging further research on school dropouts. In particular, as relates to my present study, the CREATE study Zone four concerns those children who have failed to move to lower secondary because they do not qualify (see Chapter 1, section 1.4.1). This characterisation, while useful to focus on the study of the phenomenon of transition between primary and secondary schools, also seems to reinforce that the child himself/herself is the architect of the disengagement for failing to meet the grade. However, in the Mauritian context, children who do not qualify for mainstream lower secondary schools are not categorically excluded from continuing with formal schooling. They have the opportunity to be admitted into the prevocational stream, as an alternative non-academic (vocational) track for formal schooling. It may be argued therefore that children ought not to drop out of formal school. This model of the prevocational education (PVE) was explained in section 1.3.3.6.

However, it could be said that the transition into vocational institutions of the education system is targeted at those who do not attain adequate academic grades. It is thus imbued with conceptions of failure in academic formal primary schooling. In the general public opinion, many do not interpret this redirection as a respected viable alternative for their children. This is compounded by reports which highlight that the prevocational sector has not been able to activate the expected levels of literacy and numeracy of a formal schooling enterprise (see Table 1.9). The PVE programme targets admission to

National Trade Certificates which the children in the present study believed would prepare them to acquire a job. However, these PVE programmes hardly developed literacy and numeracy levels beyond the levels of primary education which seriously jeopardised the learners' entry into the workplace of future jobs (see Table 1.8). Could the PVE therefore constitute a viable alternative? This lack of interest in pursuing prevocational schooling may arise from several factors, including the child's internal sense of underachievement, the prevocational stream being simply a repetition of the primary curriculum as well as the general negative worldview that the prevocational schooling represents a second-class type of schooling.

8.3.2 Push-out factors

This study reveals that children living in an environment lacking facilities and resources may be consciously or unconsciously **pushed out** of the education system, thus challenging the notion that children who drop out slowly disengage from school activities and the learning process. Forces acting out-of-school and in-school progressively push out the children, and it is these forces that restrict the engagement of children in school activities and the learning process. The greater push-out forces are from the overall state education policy that directly or indirectly influences the in-school and out-of-school contexts. The study seems to reveal that education policy favours affluent persons, and very often it is the middle class that benefits from it.

As decision makers and administrators are probably from the middle class, there seem to be limited possibilities for such policies to change. Since there is a need for a workforce either in the industries in the developing countries or in other sectors which are more lucrative, such as the financial or technological, schools tend to favour a capitalist agenda. Developing countries need to be competitive in the global market economy and so, through their curriculum and policy tend to decide well in advance who will work as blue-collared or white-collared workers (see section 1.3.2). The children, through their own agency and through the difficulty of assimilating such a capitalist curriculum, developed an agenda that would provide them with life skills, thus leading them more towards blue-collar jobs. Furthermore, since these developing countries need funding for their educational system, they need to turn towards international organisations, who are themselves financed by such capitalist countries. Such organisations tend to reproduce a capitalist agenda through their recommendations because of austerity, such

as to cut the cost of repetition of grades, channelling primary school failures towards a vocational institutions and other measures as prescribed by the World Bank (1985) (see section 1.3.2). As working-class children were deceived by the capitalist agenda proposed by the curriculum, they felt that they were marginalised by the school. Their reaction towards schooling was therefore antagonistic and thus they could not benefit from the privileges that schooling provided (Willis, 1977; Sayed, Carrim, Badroodien, McDonald & Singh, 2018). However, it seems that over the years, the middle class has benefited most from the privileges and moved up the ladder of social stratification. Since schooling provided reward for the middle class (Ercole, 2009), they tend to perpetuate the same system to continue benefiting from acquired privileges such as the government scholarship system. With the need to keep abreast of other capitalist countries for the CPE continues to maintain the similar pass rate which privileges certain class groups of individuals (Statistics Mauritius, 2017), in other words the academically brilliant students. For the development of the country, the policy keeps revolving around such recommendations, as shown in Chapter 1 (section 1.3.2). Hence, it seems that the influence of the wider economic contexts can dictate how a child progresses through the schooling system.

8.3.3 Pull-in factors

Fortunately, other forces within-school and out-of-school, and mediated by the experiences of the participants, **pull in** the children in their engagement in the education system. The children made use of the opportunities offered to them to counteract the push-out forces. Opportunities came from both within and outside formal schooling, such as in the form of neighbours, peers, family members and teachers, who, feeling uncomfortable with the relentlessness of the system, were prepared to offer help to the children. However, such help was not sustained over time, but it still provided them with enough hope to fulfil their agenda. I consider that from the time the children access primary schooling, they have been made to believe that the agenda of schooling is to help them get out of the type of life they are living in. As long as they behaved and kept abreast of the different changes in policy, schooling would provide them with more equality opportunities. They often hear of success stories of how low achievers, despite their distress, are able to rise above their adversities in order to achieve academic grades or to choose alternative ways of defining their success.

Children often surf on these waves of success stories, believing that with the help of the significant ones they would be able to repeat such stories. The pull-in forces offered by the relatives, the positive peers and the significant ones are all powerful shoulders upon which they can lean to reach their goals. Such successes are echoed through the media and celebrated by policy-makers as ‘success stories’. Rather than always serving as inspirational, these public representations could have the counter effect of disillusioning those who come from under-served contexts who cannot break through the ceiling of poverty or class or gender. Fortunately, the opportunities offered to the participants have helped them to strengthen their resilience in order to re-imagine their agenda.

8.4 Looking through the lens of naive and critical hope

The Mauritian system has attempted to attract students into continued schooling by introducing the policy of free and compulsory education until the age of 16. Financial resources were deployed by the state to ensure the adoption of this goal, so it would appear that the cost of schooling ought not to be the cause of children choosing to drop out. However, children from poor economic circumstances who do not make the normative academic grade performance seem to find the schooling system as not being able to satisfy their needs. The fieldwork of this study pointed repeatedly that the children felt that they do not want to be like their parents or family: they desired an alternative future. This may mean that they wanted to live a more stable life with a stable family and a household that could provide care and affection to the children. This ideal was seen as potentially attainable if one had a stable job. They came, disappointingly, to believe that formal academic schooling could not fulfil that dream. Furthermore, they experienced formal schooling as largely degrading and characterised by many injustices for children like them. Their experience was that they were repeatedly receiving a message signalling their being pushed out of formal academic schooling. In the context of the formal policy rhetoric that professed offering a compulsory schooling up to the age of 16, they resorted to the formal schooling institutions to offer them some hope. Even after their non-success at the end of CPE they accepted that the formal prevocational schooling would indeed offer this possible alternative for them, i.e to learn towards the acquisition of skills that will lead them to lucrative job. They continued to negotiate their way through formal schooling with a belief that having been admitted to formal education, and if they behaved and study

hard, in school and at home, then they would succeed. The system perpetuated the illusion that the children would be supported by offering formal policy admission to compulsory schooling (formal access), but that subtly the system communicated to these children their non-viability in such a formal academic programme. With such beliefs the children negotiated the formal schooling spaces with a naïve hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Bozaleck, Leibowitz, Carolissen and Boler, 2014) of academic success since the formal academic schooling system did not take into consideration their home situations which prejudiced their success. My present study seems, therefore, to suggest that the processes of dropping out is characterised by a vacillating process of negotiating backwards and forwards as alternatives to the process of final disengagement with the schooling project. This space is imbued with characteristics of attempts to reinstate the connection with schooling by the children who cling to the possibilities that formal schooling has a role to play in their lives. They embrace their non-successes within formal academic schooling as a reality check, but renegotiate their hope of success via alternative forms of schooling, such as the prevocational schools sector. The negotiations are imbued with elements of hope that successes could come.

8.4.1 Naïve hope

A further analytical clarification about the nature of this hope is perhaps required. One may argue that such hope is not attainable in reality, but nevertheless the children construct it as their way of negotiating their ambitious quest for success not only in schooling, but for a better life. One nevertheless, needs to critique this kind of “naïve hope” at this point. Duncan-Andrade (2009) argued that children from indigent, under-supportive homes, come to school as battered petals of roses due to the physical, mental and economic burden and rough treatment from negotiating their everyday home and community environments. Yet many teachers choose not to see what is happening in their learners’ social environment but are concerned exclusively that the children are not responding to their teaching. This non-acknowledgement by teachers constitutes the environmental spaces of classroom negotiations and predisposes learners’ hesitant preparedness to engage with the academic project. However, even if children are not in a state of readiness to be recipients of teachers’ sending signals around imparting of knowledge, teachers proceed with the pursuit of academic achievement, without taking into consideration children’s predicament. Teachers’ actions reinforce fixated

conceptions of what “children are” (their present being) and limit what “they could become” (their future becoming).

The school thus perpetuates naive hope promoting the belief that “good behaviour in class and school” would yield the goal of children becoming fruitful citizens of tomorrow. In other words, teachers create a false hope that all learners (irrespective of their “battered status”) would be able to achieve their dreams.

Over time, the marginalised children become aware that such hopes are unrealistic, unattainable or simply false and that schooling is more inclined towards academic achievement (interpreted as performance in formal academic assessments) rather than providing them with the necessary care that they need to construct an aspirational future. They are also aware that teachers, in their practice, also espouse such thoughts about equal opportunity for all learners, but through their actions, the teachers tend not to pay attention to those children’s experiences who are not considered as potentially likely to succeed. The marginalised children do not often have families who themselves have had formal academic training; the details of their lived experiences at home, in the immediate environment, thus makes academic achievement far from a realistic achievement. Duncan-Andrane’s (2009) study could well be referring to the children of my present study. The Mauritian study reveals, however, that the marginalised youth internalise a false hope that the possibility of vocational education would likely yield possibilities of accessing a job that will get them away from their struggles.

Duncan-Andrade (2009) distinguishes three types of false (naïve) hope operating in schooling contexts: *hokey* hope, *mythical* hope and *deferred hope*.

8.4.1.1 Hokey hope

Hokey hope is the representation by those in authority that schooling will solve all children’s problems. In practice, this hope is regarded as unattainable because it fails to recognise the specificities of the lived worlds of the children from a range of backgrounds. It may be possible that middle-class children are more likely to believe that they could achieve in such a representation, but this may not be necessarily true for children from under-served contexts, or “battered environments”.

8.4.1.2 *Mythical hope*

Another type of false hope is *mythical hope* where success of one or two individuals is celebrated, giving a false hope to children living in the similar conditions. Bozaleck et al. (2014, p. 14) tell us that mythical hope is “hope grounded in a false narrative of equal opportunity emptied of its *historical and political contingencies*”. As far as my study goes, the historical and political contexts suggest that children living in disadvantaged areas, and who are very often of a particular ethnic group are given a certain priority by the education policy through the creation of the ZEP project. This project, which has been discussed in Chapter 1, gives the impression that through the interactions of the families, the teachers, the school, the community and private sponsoring, the performance of the schools in the ZEP areas would increase. It was even suggested that such a project would be introduced on a national basis (ODEROI, 2008). However, the report from ADEA (2003) shows that the level of literacy and numeracy was low (see Table 1.9).

8.4.1.3 *Hope deferred*

The third type of false hope is hope deferred, where *instead of blaming the victims, the system is blamed*. Teachers are very often caught in this type of discourse by fatalistically accepting the broader systemic social inequalities as being the reason why certain children do not perform. Within my study, children coming from disadvantaged areas or embattled family contexts experienced that teachers projected that the context of the children’s home/family neighbourhoods predisposes them to not succeed. Appavoo (2014), in a similar Mauritian study, confirms that teachers internalise misconceptions about learners who originate from non-middle-class regions, expecting that they would likely fail in academic achievements. This internalised conception also provides a means of teachers absolving themselves from extended initiatives to activate change. This is also simply a coping mechanism for teachers who are also overwhelmed by the range of responsibilities to undertake during the complexities of their everyday school and classroom work.

These elements of false hope can act individually or collectively to provide notable despair to children from non-middle-class contexts. Whilst schooling ought to shape all children into believing that they could succeed in academic achievement and that they could earn more productive lives and jobs, this was not the case for all children. My

study suggests that formal academic schooling does not acknowledge the lived specificities of the homes of children from embattled contexts because it fails to acknowledge their everyday challenges.

However, Amin (2008) challenges this notion of acknowledgement, suggesting that ‘not knowing’ students may be a viable approach in teaching children in adversarial contexts. This ‘not knowing’ for Amin is a conscious attempt to disregard the specificities of the lives of children’s backgrounds so that the teacher can set higher aspirational future benchmarks for the learner. This is paradoxically not a failure of caring for the children. It may be true that children do not reveal everything about their life to teachers too, i.e. knowing is not complete, but I still believe that the relationship between teacher and student is vital and needs to be based on an element of shared trust. Even though children do not reveal everything, acknowledging their everyday lived specificities in their homes and communities, progresses towards developing an element of trust into features of caring. ‘Knowing the child’ allows teachers to adapt their teaching to the children’s specificities. Schooling has become preoccupied with attending to the normative achievement performances of those who will succeed, rather than those who are embattled. Knowing all the children and their own beings (past and present challenges and opportunities) and becomings (their future aspirations and limitations) are a means towards greater justice for all.

Within the Mauritian system, the schooling system seems to deflect the non-succeeding children towards prevocational education. This absolves teachers from attempting to assist the academically under-performing children from reaching their goals. Policy creates this loophole that it ‘cares’ for these underachievers by providing this alternative escape. This constitutes a channelling of the embattled children into the vocational field. Bozaleck et al. (2014) comment that this re-channelling by the system towards vocational education, perpetuates views held by teachers and schools that they formally have done their job, and that the children themselves are the reason for their own failure, not the teachers or the schooling system. This abandonment of deep and systemic engagement with the challenges of the underperforming children engenders despair in those children. The children negotiate the harshness of the policy and the inequity at the lower primary level of education with a sense of abandonment.

This demonstrative despair of these children is used by authorities (teachers and the schooling system) as evidence that the children are not interested in schooling. This justifies the powerful in alienating the weak. This is evident in the studies of the narratives of this study where children feel at the mercy of those who control their life opportunities. This constitutes a violation of a struggle for justice for those on the margins of society.

8.4.2 Critical hope

By contrast to the self-fulfilling prophecy of naïve hope, Bozaleck et al. (2014) suggests a deliberative form of critical hope which foregrounds the campaign for a socially just society. In their view, critical hope challenges policies that are deceptive, and which provide mere illusions of care. They suggest that advocates for deep transformation need to emphasise the *remedies of the structures that shapes the realities*. Critical hope is a conscious and overt *fight against helplessness*. According to Duncan-Andrade (2009), three elements form part of critical hope: *material hope*, *Socratic hope* and *audacious hope*.

8.4.2.1 Material hope

Material hope is what Duncan-Andrade (2009) refers to as being like growing roses on concrete. The concrete contains cracks through which the roses can find a place to grow. The quality of teaching, coupled with appropriate resources and a connected network, is what is considered as cracks in the concrete. In other words, *teachers backed by appropriate resources and supported by committed individuals can offer material hope to the children*. Quality teaching refers to making use of the daily life situations of the experiences of the children on a day-to-day basis in class. The teachers need to connect the harsh realities of the children's life in classroom, even though the full realities of the child's life may not be known.

8.4.2.2 Socratic hope

In order to grow between the cracks in adverse conditions, teachers need to be courageous, a type of hope that Duncan-Andrade (2009) refers to as *Socratic hope*. This form of hope foregrounds the need for overt dialogical relations between those in authority and those who experience being placed on the margins. These dialogues are negotiated and renegotiated on several occasions with conscious *two-way engagements*

listening to the needs, goals, aspirations and ideals of both the receivers and the givers. At the same time, teachers must have the *courage to take actions that seem meaningful to the children in their realities*. Teachers should not help embattled children to fight the battle but fight the battle with them and through them. Through the solidarity and sacrifice made by teachers, teachers can expect to ask the students to commit themselves to a level that they themselves may never expect. My study context revealed anything but a Socratic spatial engagement between the formal schooling system and the embattled children, their homes and families. The singular voice of authority dominated and marginalised the children to the periphery.

8.4.2.3 Audacious hope

The solidarity needed, the sacrifices and the collective attention between those in authority and those on the margins are what is called *audacious hope* (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Audacious hope requires that children's struggles are *treated collectively and not as individual situations* as naive hope would expect. Teachers need to assist the children *to channel their emotions and redirect their energies to productive efforts*. Instead my study seems to reveal that teachers were complicit in an agenda to remove unsuccessful learners from the formal academic schooling system. The pain that children carry as a result of not being affirmed or engaged in dialogical or audacious hope manifests itself in the classroom in different ways. Children negotiate this uncaring space either by rebellious non-normative actions or sliding into a withdrawn depression. It seems as if the pain was not engaged, thus hindering any possibility of an action of healing. This perpetuation of pain is felt not only by the embattled child himself or herself, but also ripples throughout the micro-system of the class. Even more well off and successful peers experience the alienating action vicariously. Peers resort to offer some solace to the marginalised but the dominance of an uncaring attitude prevails.

8.5 Disengagement and mediated engagement

This study did not probe in depth into the activation of critical hope within prevocational schooling spaces although one would expect that the alternative schooling space (with its less emphasised focus on assessment and performance) may potentially offer more critical hope. Unfortunately policy-makers have not seen the full potentialities offered by the prevocational sector as a true alternative offering critical hope to prevent children from being pushed out completely from the system. There does

not appear to be a concerted effort to offer prevocational as a well-resourced and valued alternative to mainstream schooling. This alternative vocational schooling therefore remains on the margins too. Rather than being a real alternative, prevocational schooling represents a lower form, merely reinforcing a hierarchical two-tiered educational system: one for the elite and another for the pushed out. My study shows that the OOSC did not find formal mainstream schooling as fulfilling their aspiration to attain a life different from their parents. Note that the PVE also forms part of the formal schooling (see Chapter 1).

The curriculum offered by prevocational schooling engages subjects like home economics, agriculture and farming, design and technology etc., where children are given the opportunity to do hands-on activities. However, the learners seem to lack even the basic literacies to be engaged with these job-promoting subjects (see Table 1.9). Perhaps the prevocational curriculum should attend to activating in remedial agendas basic foundational literacies and numeracies to offset the lack of these having been adequately formed in the children's primary schooling, or within their homes. Basic literacies and numeracies could be an important complement to activating employability of the prevocational graduate.

8.5.1 Mediated engagement

Throughout the study, I have tried to present an understanding of how children experienced their schooling and negotiated their experiences of schooling as they grew up. In particular, the study foregrounded the multiple interpretations that the children were making as they progressed through varied stages and hurdles of schooling. It was evident that the participant children in this study did not simply capitulate to the systemic pushing-out forces that deemed them as of lesser ability. Instead, failing the grade was not a fatality for them as they aspired to alternative forms of affirmation, in search of a valorised alternative to academic performance. They recreated new agendas for themselves despite the push-out forces from the formal schooling system. The children dealt with the stress that the schooling system offered with mechanisms such as stress coping mechanisms (forgetting) in some cases or retaliation against teachers in order to preserve their ego. Through these mechanisms, their reformulated aim was to be able to aspire to a job and build up a family of their own where they expected not to repeat the mistakes of their adult household members. The participants kept hinting

about how they would negotiate their life differently from their household members. This was a sign of maturity and resilience for children of less than 16 years of age and they showed how with the help of significant others who acted as pull-in forces, they negotiated with the push-out forces. However, they soon realised that their own problems and their own life-realities were not taken into consideration, which prevented them from reaching their goals.

When the system pushed them out of formal schooling (either primary or PVE), they were willing to attend an informal educational institution, which might have been an alternative way for them to attain their dreams. Chapter 1 showed that informal educational institutions, through their approach, linked the children's life experiences and home realities with appropriate pedagogy and job-related activities. The children kept negotiating between their agenda as aspirant future citizens and the push-out forces of the system. This hope for an alternative future drove their agendas.

The perspective of a vocational system was appealing to the children who believed that such a system would lead them to a more lucrative and safer job. However for them, the PVE did not represent such an alternative, although it should have done. The restrictive policy narrowed their access to vocational training. They were also frustrated by the attitudes of the teachers, administration and the children in the main stream who considered them as second class citizens. The narratives showed various clashes between the mainstream children and the prevocational children and such conflict gave the children a feeling of being unwanted. This feeling of unwantedness may be the reason why informal educational institutions represented another alternative for them. Furthermore, the prevocational children are perceived as troublemakers, disrespectful of the institutions, which makes them more marginalised than ever. This may be the reason why there are so many dropouts from the PVE as shown in Table 1.1 and Table 1.2. It should be noted that some of their class peers did feel the pain of the marginalised children and attempted to renegotiate their engagement with formal academic schooling. However, the push-out forces seemed to be more powerful than the pull-in forces. Nevertheless, admission to the prevocational is automatic for children failing the CPE. Figure 8.1 shows the route that children ought to follow during the transition between primary and secondary schooling. Those who do not join the prevocational stream or who are pushed out from the prevocational may always attend the informal educational institutions, financed by the Corporate Social Responsibility

(CSR). The CSR system was introduced in 2009, “whereby profitable companies were required to devote 2% of their book profits for carrying out CSR activities under approved programmes as per published guidelines.” (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2009, p. 1). These activities could be provided through an approved NGO, a Foundation or a Corporate partner and covered education and training as well as other areas of intervention. Thus the informal instructions provided by the approved NGO’s were financed partially or fully by CSR programmes.

8.5.2 Disengagement vs engagement

Literature about school dropouts describes the space of children during this renegotiation phase in limited ways, pointing in restricted ways to only the child attributes of disengagement. The literature foregrounds the children’s lack of commitment and overt sense of progressive distancing from the school, the classroom, and even their peers (Fredericks et al., 2004). In other words, when children disengage, they are no longer engaged in committing themselves or are less involved in learning and school activities (ibid.). The literature also attributes disengagement to three groups of factors, which are individual child-related, school-related and socially-related (Helkin & Handel, 1978; Mahadeo & Gurrib, 2009; Erktin, Okcabol & Ural, 2010; Mahalihali, 2014).

My study, by contrast, leads me to understand that children in the study were most probably keen to attend school, and even though disengaging from the formal schooling project, sought possible avenues for alternative reconnection with education through seeking access into informal educational institutions, and/or redefining other spaces where they would potentially be affirmed in the workplace or in a reconceptualised sustaining family aspiration. The children had internalised that the formal schooling system was working against them and they acknowledged that they would be pushed out. The children did not drop out solely of their own accord, despite what literature predominantly claims. This challenges the notion of a true and full disengagement. The children showed regrets after having left the institutions which they felt were unjust to them. That was the reason why they reported negatively about their formal schooling experiences. The children were weakened by the attitudes of those who were supposed to be helping them achieve their dreams. While they strove and struggled for more justice, such weaknesses were exploited by those holding power to push them out of school. This contradicts claims in the literature that children drop out and gradually

disengage from schooling. This study suggests that children at risk (embattled children), whether they live in their family or in a shelter (considered to be a place of safety), repeatedly mediate the forms of disengagement by weighing up the push-out and pull-in forces.

They became reinvigorated when they saw potential in access to alternative schooling post-primary education as yet another form of mediation of their aspirations. Their enthusiasm even during the mediated disengagement phases, however, was often manifested in a form of overt rebellion, of revolt towards those who used the schooling (and other institutional) system to prevent them from aiming higher. Eventually they capitulated when they found out that it was not only educational policies that restrained their aspirations, but also the negative stereotyped branding of their worldviews and actions which placed them at odds with the chance of success with formal schooling. Even those children who were placed into 'places of safety' bore further stigmatisation: the mark of stigma of a person 'from a shelter', categorised as a 'child beyond control'. This barred any interest in pursuing schooling as a route to success.

The mediation engagement extended to an interpretation of their life experiences as a miscarriage of justice. Furthermore, other internal policies of the management of the shelters (whether justified or not) barred these children from being incorporated into the prevocational schooling system. Many of the decisions not to incorporate the children into prevocational stream for children in shelters, were internal to the institutions they were in, a policy decision bearing the mark of the powerful. The children in the specific shelter (which is partly State funded and partly CSR funded (see chapter 3)) where the study was carried out were not allowed to join the prevocational system but were enrolled in the informal educational system of the same institution. Most probably the management was right to take such a decision, most probably believing that the PVE was not an alternative. However, the children's interpretation of such a decision was that they were unjustly deprived of their rights to attend a school of their choice. We must note that the shelter cum informal institution where the research was carried out, is one of the few that receive a grant-in-aid from the state for children attending the informal institution (Chapter 3)

However, such a decision rested mainly with the administration of the shelter institution. It may be that such a decision was taken because the shelter had its own

non-formal institution (see Chapter 3) or because it was felt that the children represented a danger, through their behaviour, to the formal prevocational institution he/she was to join. Informal educational institutions are more receptive to children labelled ‘child beyond control’ through their organisations as shown in 1.5.1. This might be the reason why informal educational institutions represented more of an alternative to critical pedagogy than the prevocational.

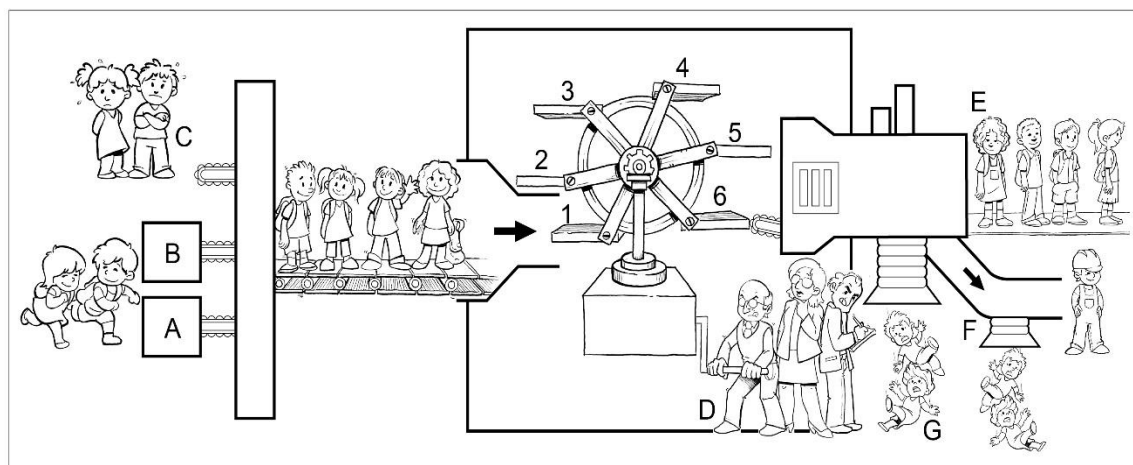


Figure 8.1: The education system in Mauritius

Key:

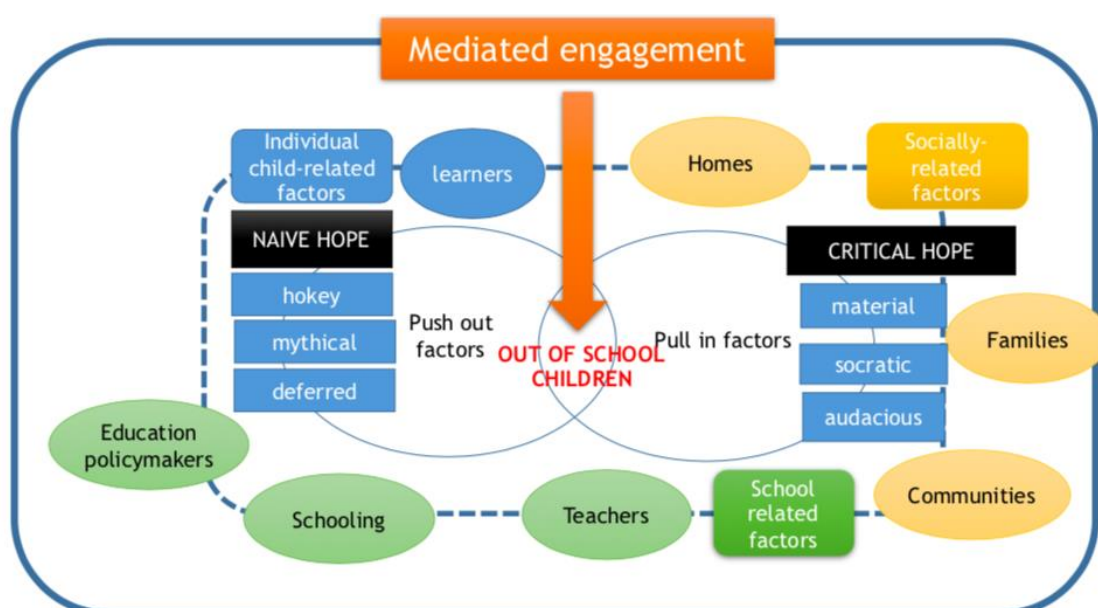
- A Children from **fee-paying** KINDERGARTEN or PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL
- B Children from **state-owned** KINDERGARTEN or PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL
- C Children **never attended** KINDERGARTEN or PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL
- D Primary school processing by **teachers and administrators**
- 1-6 Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 4, Grade 5 and Grade 6: PRIMARY SCHOOL
- E Children successful in Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) proceeding to SECONDARY SCHOOL
- F Children **failing CPE** proceeding to PREVOCATIONAL SCHOOL
- G Children **dropping out** of formal schooling either after CPE or from prevocational school

(Self designed diagram)

The diagram above (Figure 8.1) shows the journey of school children from admission to the pre-primary schooling up to either the mainstream secondary schooling (E), or to the prevocational secondary stream (F). During the transition from primary to either the formal main stream (E) or the formal PVE (F) children drop-out as Table 1.1 and Table 1.2 indicate. Children who drop out from both primary (at E) or from the prevocational (G) have two options: they can either join one informal educational institution or drop

out completely from school. In both cases, they are considered as OOSC. Children who are not in the formal education institutions are all considered as OOSC.

The diagram below (Figure 8.2) shows the life-experiences of primary school children. Extant literature largely attributes dropping out of school to children's disengagement from school. The factors of disengagement are individual-related, socially-related, and institutionally-related. However, my study has shown that children are constantly pushed-out and pulled-in either in the family, community or school contexts. The children were duped by the naive hope that the school provided potential for reaching their aspirations; however, the out-of-school children, disappointedly realised that instead of fulfilling their dreams, the primary schooling pushed them out of school. On the other hand, it seems that the significant others, relatives and positive peers were offering critical hope and pulled them back in. However I can suggest that this form of **unsustained** hope could also be considered as naïve hope, because of the absence of concerted sustained systemic engagement. The children maybe thought that such (un)sustained engagement might have helped them re-imagining the fatalistic push-out of the school system. But such hope, although being naïve, has been of some use in increasing the resiliency of the children. Maybe without such (un)sustained hope, the children's agenda would have been mediated otherwise. In search for an alternative (attend an institution that lead them to acquire lifeskill and job-skills), the children were able to mediate their own engagement, juggling through the push-out and pull-in factors.



SECTION B

8.6 Methodological, contextual and theoretical contributions

This section highlights the different contributions that the study has made.

8.6.1 Methodological contributions

My aim was to explore the interactions between the life experiences of the children in the process of dropping out rather than what causes school dropouts. Narrative inquiry gave me an opportunity to focus on whatever happens in the child's life that mediates their own in-school and out-of-school experiences to eventually stop schooling. Narrative inquiry allowed me to understand how OOSC experience their schooling and how the different relationships within the elements of the microsystems of the child interact with each other. The methodology used helped me to co-construct with the participants an understanding of how children mediate between the forces that influence their schooling in-school and out-of-school. Through narrative inquiry methods, I was able to explore the disengagement process of children. Extant literature explains children dropping out as a slow process of disengagement through social, individual and institutional factors. However, my study revealed that children did not disengage but are rather pushed out by the schooling system. Disengagement was in fact systemic rather than child-directed.

But at the same time opportunities were offered to the children by significant others, opportunities that acted as pull-in forces. The narratives have shown children who were persevering despite what they endured at home and at school, and that although they were misled by the naive hope that institutions conveyed, they never stopped searching for an alternative. The data collection phase allowed me to understand children who endured a difficult household and schooling life not in a fatalistic way but with perseverance. Although at times it was disturbing for them and myself, I feel that we both gained through that exchange. It was a moment of relief for them, when their feelings were finally being expressed and, more importantly, their voices heard.

However, the theoretical framework originally presented in Chapter 2 could not capture the signs of resilience of the children and the interaction of the different systems with the macro-environment. This points to a limitation of the Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory which could be said to foreground the layered nature of the systemic forces of influence on developing children within a social system, but perhaps underrepresents the internal divergences within the layers themselves. These two elements of children's resilience and interactivity across and within systemic layers were crucial in understanding how systemic inequity operates. It reveals the crucial role of children mediating between the push-out and the pull-in forces to renegotiate their own agenda. Through the lens of naive and critical hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2009), I was able to understand how the children mediated their engagement towards a chosen personal new alternative. Alternatives should have come through the prevocational system but such a system was a mere repetition of the primary schooling. I set up interviews to produce data from children which was deemed difficult by the dominant gatekeepers. However, I found the children full of dismay with no ear to listen to them. The research methodology itself produced perhaps an element of hope in their embattled worlds.

Whilst the children were reminiscing on their past experiences, it gave me the possibility, as a middle-class person, to review my own past experiences and to co-construct the narratives from which I was able to understand better the phenomenon. Did I as a student influence the life of working class children in my school or was I myself a working class child who used the influences of my peers and relatives to achieve? That is a difficult question for me to answer. I suppose that my peers and teachers considered me as a middle-class child (because my mother was working as a primary school teacher) but I felt more at ease amongst the working-class children, most probably due to my various life-experiences which resembled mostly those of working class children. In the end, I think that we both (the researcher and the researched) influenced and gained from each other's experiences.

8.6.2 Contextual contributions

This study has brought to light a mode of life which, even though it should not be generalised, is still very present in our Mauritian society and most probably in other

similar (developing) countries and contexts which still are characterised by multiple inequities.

There is continued violence against women and children. Children suffer from multiple forms of physical, social, psychological and symbolic violence and many women prefer to remain silent (or are silenced) because they fear the decisions of formal institutions that may remove the children from their care. The institutions that promote children's rights and protection ought to make sure that their actions do not lead to the separation of families which begets further alienations. OOSC's plea and voice should act as a cause of discomfort to our institutions rather than branding the children as 'child beyond control'. There is no child that is beyond control but only 'children in distress', who express themselves in the way that they have learnt through their household and from school. Their distress is a plea to be heard and understood.

Similarly, in Mauritius, the office of the Ombudsperson for Children (a legislated social and political office bearer) should be granted additional powers to take action against oppressors of children, rather than being only an institution issuing (uncritical) reports on the incidence of children on the margins. Currently, the enacted function of the ombudsperson for children is purely investigative and advisory (Ombudsperson for children act, 2003). Very often there is no follow up from higher authorities of the reports that the institution publishes every year. A reconceptualisation of the role of this office to hear and report the narratives and lived experiences of these children would likely yield greater sensitivity to the kinds of interventions required to assist these children reach their aspirations.

8.6.3 Theoretical contributions

From a theoretical perspective, this study shows a nuanced way of looking at school dropouts. Out-of-school children should not be looked at only from the perspective of the event of the children's disengagement. The study aims to show the intersection between both push-out and pull-in factors during their disengagement. Understanding the complexity of the forces that keep children in or push them out of school warrants deep commitment to knowing and releasing the aspirations of children on the margins. Through the lens of naïve and critical hope, we can see how misleading the enacted schooling system is as it provides naïve hope to the children. However, the children were not fatalist or simply adopted the betrayal. With the help of opportunities that

were offered to them, they mediated between the push-out and pull-in factors to negotiate their own engagement to their agenda. It also foregrounds that OOSC were not passive victims of the inequity but had strong resilience to such forces by mediating with the pull-in forces that were offered to them.

This study has highlighted how schooling within developing contexts helps reinforce the hierarchies between countries of the North and those of the South. Educational policy decisions and practices of countries from the South adopt worldviews of successful schooling models that are complicit in pushing out children who do not share normative hegemonic understandings of schooling success.

Hence, the other zones of exclusion which could extend the CREATE study should be researched in such a way as to know how the different global economic forces act on localised developing countries' national educational policies. The aim of the CREATE research was to "increase knowledge and understanding of the **reasons** why so many children fail to complete basic education successfully in low income countries" (p. 6). My study adds to the CREATE project as it focuses on the **process or processes** that prevent children transiting to lower secondary schooling, that is entry into ZONE 4 of the models of exclusion. We now know that whatever the reasons why children stay away from school, there are a series of **forces** in school, out of school and in their own lives that interact during their schooling experiences that ultimately lead the children to re-engage in alternatives that suit their agenda. Children in the transition phase have shown that they were able to negotiate the mediation of the push-out forces by making use of opportunities offered to them and the pull-in forces. I suggest that opportunities be offered to the other children in all the different zones of exclusion so that they can activate critical hope. Each zone of exclusion, as outlined by the CREATE report, could therefore be potential spaces for further exploration of mediating and negotiating forces that children could exercise. Not only should the interaction between micro-, meso- and macro-layers of the ecological framework could be considered, but also those internal factors being engaged within each layer.

SECTION C

8.7 Policy implications

The purpose of this study was to find out the complex relationships that existed between the life-experiences of children who had completed their CPE end-of-year examinations and the process of dropping out from school. What follows is a series of implications for different sectors/institutions to help decrease or eliminate inequity, and one way of doing this is through the eradication of push-out forces while reinforcing pull-in forces. However, the most important aspect is the capacity of children themselves to negotiate between the push-out and pull-in forces, with the help of opportunities that could be offered to them. Children do not drop out but mediate their own engagement. This may have several implications that are discussed below.

8.7.1 Decision-makers

8.7.1.1 Valorisation of alternative education and blue-collar jobs.

The study has shown that inequity in the educational system endures despite the professed claims to promote equality. Class, race, gender and ethnicity still remain factors which impose glass ceilings obscuring progress of all children. This inequity is a consequence of the false hope that our system conveys. However, children do not necessarily accept this agenda fatalistically. Their resilience allows them to endure exclusionary strategies, and resolve to engage attempts at re-inclusion. We have also seen that the prevocational schooling system, which should have been an alternative to these children, has failed them. This sector might be critiqued for simply serving as another repetition of the primary system which did not serve the needs of the children. The continued stigma it carries because of its association with school failures is a testimony that it is not serving as a truly worthwhile alternative.

I recommend a revalorisation of the vocational sector which should not be coupled with school failures, but really provide critical systemic hope to the children. This would entail the need for significant human, physical and financial resourcing to realise the goals and agenda of activating productive citizenry amongst those children who do not conform to the norms of formal schooling. Since this function of activating worthwhile citizens is actually being performed by the informal institutions, perhaps the policy-

makers could learn from the functioning of these same institutions. I also suggest that the structured informal educational institutions be revalorised as offering an alternative in case the prevocational system fails. Decision-makers should revamp the prevocational sector, giving the chance to all children to opt for either academic or vocational stream after having studied the basics of education in the primary sector.

I also recommend that the shelters be run as ‘real’ places of safety as I believe that actually, such institutions are not fully performing such a role. This may be the reason why ‘battered mothers’ prefer to suffer from the violence of the partners rather than report them to the Child Development Unit (CDU), for fear that the children be sent to a shelter. Making use of foster parents would have been a better solution for children who are not safe in their home.

8.7.1.2 Regionalising the educational system through the school-family-community partnership

The actual regionalisation of the education system has shown several flaws in its application because it serves more as a segregation between children of different status. The idea of the ZEP as policy is quite laudable but the praxis and the interaction between the school, the community and the families has not been fully realised. I suggest that all schools (not only ZEPs) adopt the real regionalisation involving the school, the community and the family in order to provide a critical pedagogy through critical hope. The policy-makers need to understand how children coming from disadvantaged areas are ‘battered’ and therefore adopt a strict regionalisation in the admission process, giving the chance to children to gain from the presence of capable peers. This would ensure that the agenda of children from indigent homes, embattled families and under-resourced or unstimulating contexts may be given targeted attention through formal educational intervention which recognises them and their specificities at localised levels, rather than simply pathologise their educational underachievement.

8.7.1.3 Heterogeneous classes

This research study has shown that working-class children will gain more if they are not segregated from their middle-class peers. The latter group serves as pull-in forces which could motivate and inspire the marginalised child. Such heterogeneous classes might be more manageable for teachers if the regionalisation process is calibrated more sensitively to address the varied diversities within regional communities. Such

communities already demographically constitute a heterogeneous array of classes, ethnicities and genders. If the school classrooms were to be composed of front and back-benchers and if the class sizes are not too large, this provides a possibility for teachers using resources for activating the potential of all. Most probably a seating arrangement around round tables with a subtle mix of working class and middle-class children would break down that inferiority/superiority complex that may arise. The lessons should then be more collaborative and transformative. I believe that the positive peers know already how ‘battered’ indigent children are and collectively with the help of the teachers the right pedagogy could be used. However, this choice for a more equitable option for schooling warrants a shift in ideological commitment of not only teachers, but also communities, politicians, policy makers, and the wider society of uplifting the potential of all children within a democratic agenda. Schooling is an agent for the kind of society it aims to develop.

8.7.1.4 *Adopting critical pedagogies*

However, there is also the very pertinent issue of teachers’ practice and lack of social justice as far as working class children are concerned. I would recommend that teachers faithfully build up a relationship with their children in adopting a critical pedagogies approach. Teachers should be aware of the realities of the children and be courageous enough to adapt their pedagogy to the children’s needs. The study has shown how children respond positively when opportunities are offered to them. This opportunity should be sustained over time, even if for some reason the children move to another school. This should become the habituated praxis underpinning teachers’ decision-making approaches. This would also ensure a sense of ethics in teachers’ approach and a global political vision rather than naive decisions. This would lead to a better valorisation of the children themselves to have a higher self-esteem. The study has shown that success or failure was not a reason for disengagement but the way children were valorised/devalued was determinant in their decision towards a mediation of their engagement. This has possible implications for how both initial (pre-service) and continuing teacher education and development is undertaken. It raises further questions about the kinds of theoretical underpinnings of what such professional development consists. Furthermore, within the chosen enactment of pedagogies of teaching, learning and assessment strategies should not only be concerned with delivery and monitoring of curriculum content knowledge and/or class management. Instead, evaluation of

teachers' professionalism should be directed also to how they adopt more democratic agendas with respect to children on the margins.

8.7.2 Policy makers

The targeted education project may be a problem in the education sector and a more general project could be implemented, where parents would not resort to underhand manoeuvres to have their children admitted to 'star schools'. The notion that children disengage because they fail their primary schooling is no longer a valid reason for not promoting more creativity in our educational programmes. With new policies including more holistic programmes could be introduced and given due recognition, whether children opt for academic or vocational streams. The choice should be given to children and not imposed through the stress of a selective examination. It is acknowledged that such reconstruction of the elevated status of the CPE examination is the focus of new policy reform that has been introduced (in 2015) after the fieldwork of my own study. Therefore, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address the potential impact of this initiative. Future studies must address this influence of the new reform in realising better social justice

The selection criteria for a pass or failure at the end of primary schooling should be reviewed and made clearer and should never be a criterion for further segregation.

The branding 'child beyond control' should disappear as there is no child who is beyond control. Children may have behaviour problems but the cause of such problems could be treated by appropriate adults in the education sector rather than excluding the child from having an equitable access to education. It is noted that these agendas for curriculum policy reform have been introduced after the completion of the data production fieldwork stage of the course of my study. However, these interventions now fall outside the scope of the timing of the data production for this study. It remains therefore to be seen how the introduction of the new Nine Years of Basic Continuous Education (NYBCE, 2015) does or does not activate the agenda of a more equitable schooling system. The professed goals of the new reform aim to challenge the dominating agenda of the Certificate in Primary Education (CPE) as the target which has previously driven the agenda of much pedagogical intervention in schooling (See Samuel & Mariaye [forthcoming] for discussion of these innovations).

8.7.3 Support programmes

The study shows that the matriarchs invest most of their pension allowance to render the lives of the children as comfortable as possible. Furthermore, they are the most influential persons within the family setting for disadvantaged children. I suggest that they are given a special compensation above the pension to cater for the needs of the children. The school authorities should also make it a point to deal directly with the matriarchs rather than only with the immediate parents of the children because the parents are already caught between work and household duties. However, the importance of the matriarch as a strong pull-in force in the life of the children needs to be worked upon and encouraged on a larger scale. Since parents are very often not available because of their work, most probably school administrators could find a way of turning towards the matriarch to discuss matters concerning the children. Social workers could be used to reach the parents at home in the afternoon as done by the non-formal institutions.

We have seen also in the study the housing problems encountered by children and family members, with no apparent facilities. I suggest that a proper housing scheme be set up for such people in need and to avoid making use of housing estates, which cause prejudice to the families, both in terms of acceptance in the environment and schooling access.

We have also seen how men in general have a problem in obtaining a job due to the policy of possessing a character certificate. We suggest that such a policy be alleviated to take only into consideration the latest larceny committed rather than allow the stigma of an early offence to be a punitive blemish for life. The link between economic climate and employability of different classes has thus a clear bearing on the productivity of children within the schooling system.

8.7.4 Ministry of Gender Equality

The report on shelters (Ministry of Gender Equality, 2015, p. 22) has already revealed the dysfunction of the residential care homes and shelters in the island. Some shelters are not deemed to be called 'a place of safety' (p. 22). The study has also shown how life in the shelters is difficult for children who have already suffered a lot before being sent there. The report recommends that children in distress should not be placed in

residential care and should be allowed to live as ‘normally’ as possible in society, within home and community structures. I reiterate this recommendation as I believe that the so-called places of safety have doubtful functioning and increase the aggressiveness of children. It is to be wondered whether such shelters are not responsible for the rejuvenation of crimes and larceny. The gap in dysfunction may not necessarily be linked to the management of such institutions, but to the different power related issues amongst the children within the institutions.

SECTION D

8.8 Study limitations

One of the limitations of this study is that it concerns only children who are actually in a non-formal institution. But there are also children who have dropped out and have become street children. They may have lived different experiences, which could have shed more light on their disengagement process and whether they lived schooling in the same way as the participants of the study.

Furthermore, even though the focus of the study concerns only 4 participants, the data obtained was quite rich in order so as to be able to generate in-depth knowledge, hence its importance for policy implications. The generation of thick rich data was made possible by the use of narrative inquiry which allows the stories themselves to become raw data which in turn generates in-depth knowledge. The aim of such studies is not to produce generalisability; instead its goal is to generate the opening up of new possibilities for insight in to the phenomenon of the study and yield new research directions. It is unfortunate that one of my chosen samples from a shelter who was a student of the research site was not granted permission to be one of my participants and, therefore, my study limits itself to life in only one shelter. However, the report on the shelters (Ministry of Gender Equality, Child development and Family Welfare, 2015) gives a general view on the mismanagement and dysfunction of the shelters in Mauritius.

The educational context in Mauritius is undergoing several changes and the realities of data collected may not match existing policy decisions that have been applied lately (see section 1.3.2 for the changes). I however, can only remain true to the data as it was at the point of data production that pre-empted more recent reforms. We look forward to the future potential of these reforms.

SECTION E

8.9 Recommendations for future research

My research has tended to foreground the fact that working-class children would benefit from being in a shared environment with middle-class children. The other side of the coin is worth considering: would middle-class children also benefit from the said relationship? Knowledge of the benefits could be used to challenge the segregation of children in the educational context. Often the argument is presented that targeted separate abilities and agenda could direct targeted appropriate pedagogy which is beneficial to the “segregated groups”. However, my study is making a case that mixed-ability classes have benefits to both the marginalised and the privileged. The real challenge is not the children themselves, but more likely the teachers whose world-views are dominated by protecting middle-class values and agendas.

This study has taken into consideration only children in Zone 4 of the CREATE study. Further research in the other different zones could also be carried on the influences of the life-experiences of OOSC on the process of dropping out.

The strong relationship between the matriarchs and the working class children has shown that the matriarchs are very powerful pull-in forces in the life of the children. Further research could be conducted to see if similar trends in the relationship between different or similar family members may also hold influence for middle-class children. Due to economic issues, working class children live mostly in extended families with a strong matriarch as the head of the family, whereas middle-class children live mostly in nuclear families. It would be useful, based on the recommendations made above, to see if the relationship between the matriarchs and middle-class children is also a strong pull-in force in the schooling of the children. Or who else constitutes the motivational support forces within middle class children’s homes?

Topics for further research could include, for example, the role of the matriarchs in middle-class societies and its influence on children’s experiences of schooling. Another topic for further research is the role of the head-teachers in the primary schools, a comparison between a ‘star-school’ and a ZEP school. Do head-teachers encounter similar or divergent problems in managing diverse children in the centre and on the margins, and what are these problems and what explains these problems? The

implementation of 'school project for critical pedagogies' could also be a subject for further research. It would be interesting to find out how teachers are prepared to transgress the norms, especially in schools in disadvantaged areas. The influence on working class children of 'a taste of middle-class' (through direct and indirect exposure in homes, communities, families, and/or socially settings) could be explored more profoundly. This could serve to understand more deeply what factors constitute pull-in forces for children who sit on the margins of formal schooling. Furthermore, one could explore what kinds of resources do children themselves (across and within different class groupings) believe constitute the sources of positive or negative influence on their own schooling experiences. Where these resources are located (physically, psychologically, economically, emotionally) might also be worthy of further research.

SECTION F

8.10 Concluding thoughts

This section brings me to the end of a journey where there is still a long road to travel. My study has shown me that the engagement from the early stages of admission of children into schooling until they reach their desired outcomes is obstructed consciously or unconsciously, with hurdles that prevent children from achieving their goals. These obstacles are the influences not just of the children themselves, but also symptomatic of global market economies which are stacked in favour of more privileged peoples, places and perspectives. Nevertheless, out-of-school children have not allowed themselves to be frustrated by the naive hope provided by our educational system but have fought back against the inequities. This brings us to believe that children are capable of fighting back. Children of all persuasions and possibilities, within and across different socially constructed categorisations of class, race, gender and ethnicities, can mediate their own engagement: there is hope for a better future for them. Such critical hope can come from a pedagogy and systemic policy interventions that could provide alternatives to the children. These alternatives can be provided by informal institutions which offer potentially a closer concern for a critical pedagogy. However, the problem of OOSC is not policy alone, but it is also about how children are viewed in school by teachers, administrators. It also depends on how children are viewed in their

community. The family, relatives, community and institutional relationships are of utmost importance in the life of disadvantaged children. The norms and values of society at large tend to make the children look like victims whereas the children are capable of resisting victimhood.

I can still visualise the aches, pains and blame that my participants have carried from their childhood until they had an opportunity to voice their feelings. Such pleas have remained unheard by the school and the teachers who were responsible for them. This research may be a step towards critical hope as most probably, by expressing themselves, the children would have made a step further in quest of their dreams. I sincerely wish that their voices could be heard so that such injustices may not be repeated, so that this generation and the other generations of children do not feel excluded from the educational system.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical Approval



12 February 2015

Mr Jacques Laval Lindsay Paul 213573514
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/0053/015D

Project title: Out-of-school children's perspectives of early formal education in Mauritius.

Dear Mr Paul

Expedited Approval

In response to your application dated 03 February 2015, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: Professor Michael Anthony Samuel
cc Co-Supervisor: Professor Rada Tirvassen
cc Academic Leader Research: Professor P Morojele
cc School Administrator: Ms T Khumalo, Mr S Mthembu & Ms B Bhengu

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Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

Appendix 2: Consent Form

DECLARATION of CONSENT FORM

Title: Out-of-school children's perspectives of early formal education in Mauritius.

I ALAN MUNEEAN (full names of director) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the study and I hereby grant permission to the researcher to use the center's premises to have access to the out-of-school children attending my center in line with the terms of reference set out in the above letter. I also agree to allow the researcher to make use of the psychologist's/ social-worker's services for the welfare of the children.

I hereby consent / ~~do not consent~~ to permitting the researcher to have access to my center.

The Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Clearance Committee contact numbers are as follows:

Research Ethics Office

Govan Mbeki Centre

Westville Campus

031 260 4557 or 8350 (telephone)

031 260 4609 (Fax)

E-mail address: mohunn@ukzn.ac.za

Signature of director



19/12/14
Date

Appendix 3: Information Sheet

Responsible party's Information sheet

Title of study:

"Out-of-school children's perspectives of early formal education in Mauritius".

Dear parent/ guardian,

I invite your son/ daughter/ ward Emilie Sidore to take part in a research study as part of a study at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, in Durban (Edgewood Campus). This study will examine why children of 12 to 16 dropout from school after their Certificate of Primary Education examination or before completing their pre-vocational curriculum of 4 years. Two issues are important:

- a) Why are children out-of-school?
- b) How has the elements of the micro-system influenced the development of the child?

I will conduct three interviews with her. The duration of each of these interviews will be approximately 1 hr.

The interview will be audio/video taped. Your son/ daughter/ ward will be asked to give her approval to be audio/video taped and she has the right to refuse to comply.

Every effort will be made to ensure that no one will know that she took part in this study. If I use any information that she shares with me, I will be careful to use it in a way that will prevent people from being able to identify her. To protect her your identity I will ask her to provide a different name during the interview.

She is free to withdraw from the research at any stage without negative or undesirable consequences. All information is only intended for the research purposes. All data recordings and transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet.

I wish to point out that no harm will be done to her. If she happens to recall events that may be hurtful, I will assure that she be followed by a psychologist. She also has the right to ask me not to publish any event that she feels should not be disclosed.

The supervisors of this project are Professor Michael Samuel from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Education and Professor Rada Tirvassen from the Mauritius Institute of Education.

Thank you for your co-operation.



Emilie Sidore

Appendix 4: Parent Informed Consent Form

Parent's informed consent form

Informed Consent for _____, responsible party of
participant Palaver
Permission pour Emilie Isidore, responsable de l'eleve
.....

Title of research: Out-of-school children's perspectives of early formal education in Mauritius.

Declaration

I _____ (full names of responsible party) hereby
confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of this research project and I
consent to the participation of my son/ daughter/ ward in the interviews.

Moi, Sheila Isidore (noms et prénom entier du responsable) confirme que j'ai lu le
document et je n'ai pas d'objection que mon fils/ ma fille prend part dans l'entrevue.

I understand that

- (1) All information will be held confidential at the interviewer's place,
- (2) Her participation is voluntary and she may stop at any time if she feels uncomfortable,
and
- (3) The interviewer does not intend to inflict any harm to my son/ daughter/ ward and if
during the interview she may recall events that have been painful to her, the interviewer will
take care of the issues.

Je comprends que

- 1) Toute information sont confidentielles
- 2) Sa participation est volontaire et qu'elle peut s'arreter à n'importe quel moment.
- 3) Que l'entrevue ne causera de peine a mon fils/fille.

SIGNATURE OF RESPONSIBLE PARTY

25/04/2015
DATE

Appendix 5: Participant Informed Consent Form

DECLARATION FORM

Title: Out-of-school children's perspectives of early formal education in Mauritius.

I parlance n/ai g/ro (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent / do not consent to be audio-taped while being interviewed for the research project. If I refuse to be audio- taped, I understand that I may continue to participate in the study if both parties agree, otherwise I am free to cancel my participation.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.



Signature of participant

30 May 2015
Date

Appendix 6: Declaration of Consent

DECLARATION of CONSENT FORM


Title: Out-of-school children's perspectives of early formal education in Mauritius.

I Mrs Lakshna Ellakkee / Social Worker (full names of parent/ care-giver) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the study and I hereby grant permission to the researcher to conduct the interview with my son/ daughter/ ward about their experiences of pre-primary and primary schooling, in line with the terms of reference set out in the above letter.

I hereby consent / do not consent to permitting the researcher to conduct this study with my son/ daughter/ ward.

The Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Clearance Committee contact numbers are as follows:

Research Ethics Office
Govan Mbeki Centre
Westville Campus
031 260 4557 or 8350 (telephone)
031 260 4609 (Fax)
E-mail address: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za



Signature of parent/care-giver

27 May 2015
Date

Appendix 7: Extract of interview of Pravin Creole/Transliterated

TITLE OF STUDY: Out-of-school children's perspectives of early formal education in Mauritius.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN MAURITIUS.

INTERVIEW SHEET NUMBER: INT2/PRA/AT/071015

Researcher: MR LINDSAY PAUL(R)

Participant: Pravin (P)

Start time: 9.30hrs

End time:

Key:

Colour: Kreol researcher

Colour: Trans-literated researcher

Colour: Kreol participant

Colour: Trans-literated participant

* : pseudonym used

PURPOSE: THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY IS TO CAPTURE OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF EARLY FORMAL EDUCATION IN MAURITIUS

Rezon : Rezon sa letid-la se pou gagn lexpéryans Out-of School Chilren (Zanfan an'deor Lekol) lor ledikasyon Formel dan Moris.

CONVERSATION INFORMEL

Pravin has been briefed before to talk directly to the mike as the interview was carried out in Jardin D'Eveil. He was also told not to shake the head to acknowledge or refuse as this is not easily translated in an interview

R. **Bonzour Pravin/** good morning Pravin

P. **Bonzour/** Good morning

R. kot to sipoze dan prevok mem si tonn fel...to sipoze dan prevok...mai to pa trouv toi dan lekol...ok...e donk... par rapor a sa...mosey get ene kout...enfin...mo espere...mo kapav ariv trouv ban rezon...kifer...kifer enn zenfan pa retrouv li dan lekol...bien souvan nou tann dir ki ...ouais...zenfan la pa envi apran...so fami pa envi li apran...si pa ki zafer...mwa mo... mwa mo dir coumsa ki...kelke par...ena ban lezot rezon...ena ban lezot fakter...et a traver se ki to pou dir mwa...nou guete si nou trouv ban fakter la....ok... bon ...apre sa ce ki pou arive...mo pou pran to 'interview' ki to pe donn moi pou fer li vinn enn zistoir...apres nou va tom dakor ent nou de ...sipa to dakor ek zistoir la ou bien to pa dakor...ou bien... monn dir ban bout ki pa bon...ou bien...ok... deziem zafer to donn moi to permission enrezistre toi...pa bouz la tet/ where you are supposed to be in prevoc even if you have failed...you are supposed to be in prevoc...but you do not see yourself in school...ok...and so... because of that I try to see...well...I hope...icould see the reasons...why...why...a child is out of school...very often we hear that... yes... the child does not want to study...his family does not want him to study...and so on...but I ... I say that ...somehow...there are other reasons...there are otherfactors...and that thorough what you will tell me...we will see if we can see those factors...ok...well...then what will happen...I will take your interview that you are giving me and make a story out of it...then we will agree both of us...if you agree with the story or you do not agree... or whether I said things that are not true... or... ok...second thing you give me permission to tape you...do not move your head

P. **ouais/**yes

R. trwazieman ... a nimport ki moman to envi arete... to capav arete...ok...si to pou arete avan...tou se ki to pou dir moi...mo pou efas li... mo pa pou servi li dan mo resers...ok... ale...bien bon....nou koumanse...enn deziem zafer...don moi to nom inkou/ third... at any time you wish to stop...youcan do so...ok...if youwant to stop before...all that youwill tell me...I will erase it...iwill notuse it inmy research...ok...ok very good... letstart now... a second thing... give me your name

P. **pravin/** pravin *

R. **pravin.../** pravin

P. **pravin M.../** pravin M...

R. non... pa bisin to done moi le zot nom...en sel aser...bon...pou resers...mo pa pou appel toi ... donn moi enn nom ki to preferer/ no... do not give me other names...one is enough...well...for the research...I will not call yougive me a name that you prefer

P. /

R. nimport... goldorak...alain/ anything...goldorak...alain

P. mmm.../ mmm...

R. enn nom ki to kontan...koumsa kan mo ekrir li dan mo resers ...mo met enn nom ki to kontan...kanto trouv to nom...to trouv enn nom ki to kontan...mo pou al servi ene nom pou twa... to risker pa kontan/ a name that you like ...then when i write it in my research...I put a name that you like...when you will see your name...you will see a name that you like...I will use a name for you... you might not like

P. met mo nom mem/ put my name

R. hein.../ hein...

P. mo nom mem/ my name

R. non... pa gagn drwa / no...i do not have the right

P. pa gagn drwa.../ do not have the right

R. non... pa gagn drwa...dan mo...dan lizie resers/ no... i do not have the right... in my...in the eyes of research

P. ouais/ yes

R. faudre pa dimoun rekonet twa...dan...tou se ki to pou dir mwa/ no one should be able to recognise you... in... all that you will tell me

P. p.../ p...

R. ziska taler to.../ you have till later

P. pravin/ pravin

R. hein/ hein...

P. pravin/ pravin

R. pravin...aller...hey... ki laz to ena pravin/ pravin... aler...hey... how old are you pravin

P. sez/ sixteen

R. seze ans...hey... ki lekol preprimer...ki lekol maternel tone aler/ sixteen years...hey... which pre-primary...which maternal school you went to

P. la plam*... mone al plam... apre monn vinn...pere noel*....pere noel apre monn al lekol labonne* / plam*...i went to plam... then I came to father Xmas*... father xams then I went to labonne* school

R. pre-primer monn dir twa la...maternel/ pre-primary I told you....maternal

P. ouasi...la plam/ yes to plam

R. ok... ki lekol mater...lekol primer tonn ale/ ok...what mater...primary school did you attend

P. sa ve dir ena la plam...berchoo bay*...avek ena labonne ici...governman...labonne/ which means there is the plam...berchoo bay...and there is labonne here...government ...labonne

R. bon...mo pa tro tro konpran la hein/ well...i do not much understand

P. ban lekol monn aler/ the schools I attended

R. de ki laz a ki laz tonn rent...huh...couma to dir moi sa... kot sa/ from what age to what age did you enter...huh...what did you tell me...where

P. labonne...la plam....se a dir... ki laz mo ti ena...sis an/ labonne...la plam ...which means...how old i was... six years

R. non... to pan al lekol maternel/ no...you did not attend maternal school

P. lekol maternel...ouais... monn ale/ maternal school...yes...I went

R. ki laz to ti rent laba/ at what age did you enter there

P. mo pa kone/ I don't know

R. a pe pre/ approximateley

P. kapav...sink an/ maybe...five years

R. sink an...sink an topa sipose dan lekol .../ five years... five years were you nt supposed to be in school...

P. ouais...maternel la mo pa kone/ yes... the maternal school I dont remember

Appendix 8. Translated interview of Pravin

TITLE OF STUDY: Out-of-school children's perspectives of early formal education in Mauritius.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN MAURITIUS.

INTERVIEW SHEET NUMBER: INT2/PRA/AT/

Researcher: MR LINDSAY PAUL(R)

Participant: Pravin (P)

Start time: 9.00hrs

End time: 9.46 hrs

Key:

Colour: Kreol researcher

Colour: Trans-literated researcher

Colour: Kreol participant

Colour: Trans-literated participant

* : pseudonym used

PURPOSE: THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY IS TO CAPTURE OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF EARLY FORMAL EDUCATION IN MAURITIUS

R. Good morning Pravin

P. Good morning

R. [Hey] in relation with what [huh] what [pause] we talked about last time, there are a few points that needed to be cleared. One point where I am not sure. I see somewhere as if you talked [pause] about the mother of your stepmother [pause] was staying with you. Did I hear right or did I hear wrong?

P. What? My stepmother's mum?

R. Yes.

P. No. My stepmother.

R. Your step- mother, [pause] not the mother of your stepmother?

P. No.

R. Ok, that's one point. Second [hey] when you talk about your uncles and aunts, how many uncles and aunts do you have?

P. This means, that makes [thinking] three uncles [pause] with [pause...thinking] four aunts [hesitant] four, five aunts.

R. Four, five aunts [confirming tone]?

P. Yes

R. All are brothers and sisters of your father?

P. No, some are not.

R. So, how many brothers and sisters of your father are there in that group?

P. That means there is one brother [thinking], one [heu] no, two brothers and two sisters.

R. Two brothers, two sisters [confirming] [heu] they were staying in the same place where you were staying, there?

P. Yes. They stayed there and then they left.

R. Then they left [confirming]. When you left then they went away, or?

P. No, from the time that I was there itself.

R. Since you were there itself they left [confirming]. [Heu] Well, this means that on your father's side, there were two brothers and two sisters.

P. Yes.

R. [Heu] on your mother's side, there were one brother, two sisters?

P. Yes [unsure, hesitant voice].

R. You told me three uncles and four aunts in all?

P. Yes.

R. Ok. After that you talked about your cousin, having two children. Your cousin, its your, your uncle's child?

P. My cousin, I mean, yes, my uncle.

R. Your uncle **[confirming]**. Uncle?

P. No, my father's, my father's sister.

R. **[pause]** your father's sister, it's your aunt!

P. It's the same thing **[a bit annoyed]**.

R. **[persisting]** it's not your cousin, then. It's your aunt?

P. It means my cousin all together, my thing. My uncle also **[very confusing]**.

R. No. I don't understand that part.

P. It means there was my cousin all in that. Have cousins also.

R. Yes. You have cousins. It means that you have elder cousins. A cousin is **[unterminated]**.

P. One is twenty five. Twenty five or twenty seven.

R. If she has two children, this means that, according to me she must be twenty five or twenty seven **[still confused]**. Ok. Did she also stay in the same compound where you were staying?

P. Yes. Yes

R. Now, you also talked about a cousin at Kat-kolonn*.

P. Yes. Kat-kolonn. Yes.

R. That one, who is she?

P That cousin, as if, my father; my father's sister.

R. mmm mmm **[acknowledging]**.

P. Kat-kolonn.

R. She stays at Kat kolonn. **[At this point it's as if Pravin does not make any difference between cousins and aunts; maybe it's the Asian interpretation of family relationships]**.

P. Yes.

R. Hey, I don't understand why, why at some point in time, you stayed at Kat-kolonn?

P. Because at that time there were problems at home.

R. you were having problem at home **[confirming]**.

P. Yes **[tone became more reserved]**.

R. It's as if they took you and sent you there?

P. Mmmm Mmmm **[a confirmation mumble]**.

R. Then how did you manage your schooling?

P. At school, I was going, I was studying **[low voice]**.

R. No. You were, you were **[searching for question]**, when you were staying at Kat kolonn, were you going to school?

P. No.

Appendix 9: Facebook interaction

Following is a conversation with an ex-student of mine on Facebook in which I was involved and which shows how affluent people perceive the disadvantaged.

[Name](#) withheld 🙄 feeling angry

[12 hrs](#) ·

Dans Maurice Ou ena 2 Categorie Citwayen.!

1er la li traC li Fer Sacrifice Dpi So Enfance, Li CouP tranC Pu li Fer ProgrE, Li Avoy SO 2 Zenfant Lekol Pu 1 L`avenir Meyer.. LI Economiser Li AcheT 1 Ti Portion la Terre Pu Construire 1 Ti Lakaz Sekiriz So Fami.

2eme La Li Appendant Ek Gouvernma, Li Pas Pu TraC Travay Nanie.! En + Ki Li Squatters.. Li Ena Chaines Satellitaire Bouquet Complet Lor So Ti Lakaz Tole, Compo 20,000 Watt baT Fer Tole La trembleR, Li Em Ki Dir Ou Gouvernma Pas Bon Kan National Empowerment Foundation pas Vin En Aide a Li.! Li em Ki + dans Bese Mais liena 7 piti, Li beneficier Cahier, Livre, Mayo, Sozet, Crayon, Eguizoir, Plis Donne li Aide Financier pu piti la ale Lekol.! Li Fer Piti Pu GOuvernma Nourrie..!!

Translation: there are 2 categories of citizens in Mauritius! The 1st one who has done a lot of sacrifice since childhood to progress in life, sends both his children to school for a better future.. He is able to save to buy a piece of land to build a house for his family to be secure. The 2nd type hangs on to government facilities, and is not bothered to search for a job. On top of all, he squats land, possesses satellite TV on his corrugated sheets house, compo 20,000 watts full blast in the house. When he does not receive help from the National Empowerment Fund, he says that the government is useless. He is the one who is needier, but he has 7 children, he obtains free copybooks, books, underwear, socks, pencils, pencil sharpener, plus financial aid to send the children to school. He reproduces for the government to feed his children. [15 likes]

This is followed by one of his friends comment:

[Name](#) withheld: Mo d'accord ek toi! Pou tout les temps ena bane vermines, bane levère ki pou souce disang bane bon citoyen honnetes et travayer! Malgré mo konner to pas p generaliser, mo trouver ena dimounes p koir to p dir tout dimounes misere ki p ggn support bane hypocrites.

Translation: I agree with you. Every time there are vermins, worms who will suck on honest working citizen's blood. I know you are not generalising, but I can see that there are people who think that you mean that for all poor people who are getting support from the government hypocrites. [2 likes] [ca. 2015]. In Facebook. Retrieved January 13, 2015, from https://www.facebook.com/hansen.veeren/posts/10153075768019973?comment_id=10153075881494973¬if_t=feed_comment_reply.

Appendix 10: Editor's Certificate

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DECLARATION OF PROFESSIONAL EDIT

Dropping out of School: Life Experiences of Mauritian Learners

by

Jacques Laval Lindsay Paul

I declare that I have edited and proofread this document. My involvement was restricted to language usage and spelling, completeness and consistency, referencing style, and formatting of headings, captions and tables of contents. I did no structural re-writing of the content and did not influence the academic content in any way.

Norman Baines
BA (Hons) LLB

Appendix 11 Turnitin certificate

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